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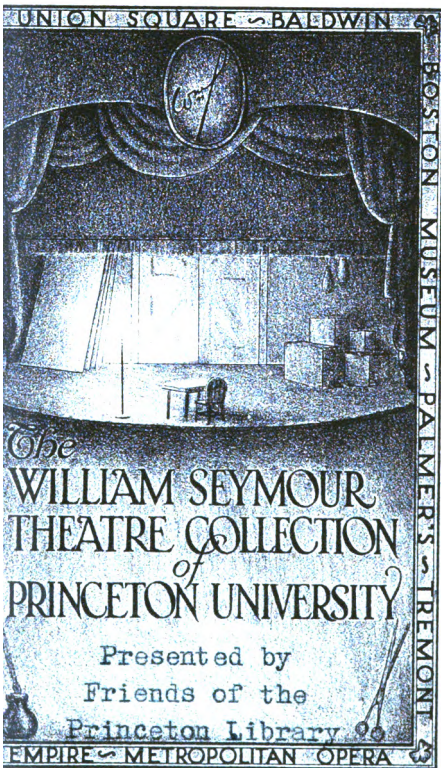
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SCOTT

THIRTY YEARS AT THE PLAY



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THIRTY YEARS AT THE PLAY

BY
CLEMENT SCOTT.



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THIRTY YEARS AT THE PLAY

AND

Dramatic Table Talk.

BY

CLEMENT SCOTT.


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For nearly thirty years we have sat side by side in the playhouse, and for not one moment has our sincere friendship been disturbed, nor our energy slackened in the cause of the art we have loved so well.

Accept a tribute of my regard for a loyal companion in the dedication to you of this unworthy little volume of memoranda. We have weathered many a storm together, and I will cordially own that when my heart has grown faint, courage has come again by contemplating the cheerful smile on your welcome face, and feeling the encouraging grip of your honest hand.

Yours ever,

CLEMENT SCOTT.

889738

(RECAP)

THIRTY YEARS AT THE PLAY.

It is one of the fashionable literary amusements of the day to forecast the future, as it were—to antedate time—and with graceful conceit to imagine what the world will be like a hundred or a thousand years hence. Thus we are told, that with the beneficent aid of socialism, or communism, or by a liberal supply of pessimism, or some other ism, our successors are to live in a wonderful world, where everyone will be rich, and no one will be discontented; and where a paternal State will provide food, clothing, amusements and eternal happiness, without the trouble of toiling or seeking for either of these necessities. Now, were I to follow this course of exaggerated fancy, I might imagine a prophetic period of the drama, where every-

thing was right and nothing wrong, a millenium, in which we believed all our authors to be Shakespeares, all our actors Keans, all our actresses Rachels, and all our wretched critics a happy compound of Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, and John Oxenford !

But to-day, with your permission, ladies and gentlemen, I intend deliberately to reverse this interesting process. Ours shall be a determined course of *Looking Backward*. I do not propose to speak of the drama of the future, but the drama of the past, not an altogether old world and exploded drama, dug out of books, pieced together by this memory or that, but a drama with which many of us here to-day are familiar, and of which I myself have had a long practical and personal experience. I do not intend on this occasion to speak of things of which I have heard, but of things which I know, of plays I have seen, of actors I have criticised, of men and women with whom I have conversed, and with many of whom I have been on terms of close personal intimacy.

Now I want you to bear with me a little whilst I put the clock of the world back for exactly thirty years. I want you to exercise your imagination, and believe that to-day it is the 25th October, 1860, and not the 25th October, 1890. But before we take up the daily newspaper of thirty years ago, and looking *under* the clock, decide which of the theatres we shall visit, and which of the various London entertainments we shall enjoy, it will be necessary for me briefly to explain the actual state of affairs, and to tell you candidly the exact position the drama is now in—to show you, as well as I can, the real state of health of this changeable, shaky, tottering drama at the latter end of October, 1860.

You know it is the reproach of all old playgoers that they are persistent praisers of the past. But so far as the year 1860 is concerned, I positively refuse to be a *laudator temporis acti*. I do not believe that ever before, and certainly, according to my own experience, never since, has the English stage been in such a wretched,

down-at-heel, untidy and deplorable condition. The stage was without a leader. Macready had retired nearly ten years before, and was living as a private gentleman at Cheltenham, having bequeathed to his successors little but the record of his worst faults and mannerisms. The genius was gone: the growling and the grunting remained behind! Charles Kean, an enthusiast who had done so much for the Shakespearean and romantic drama, and who spent his money with such lavish prodigality, had retired from the old Princess's Theatre, a poorer and a sadder man. He had done his best: he could do no more. He had not the genius of his father, but he loved his art as well, and served her to the utmost of his natural ability. The death knell had been tolled of the memorable Sadler's Wells management, one of the most edifying records of the past few years, and honest Samuel Phelps was struggling on without the loyal assistance of his faithful business partner, Tom Greenwood.

Protection in its worst and most obstinate form prevailed, and was encouraged

by the directors of our public amusements. Free trade was scouted as a heresy. No critic of that day dared to allude to the French stage or French actors, under penalty of a managerial *boycott*, although the authors of the period stole all their plots and most of their dialogue from French plays—and never dreamed of paying for them. Only a few years before a French Company had dared to come to England and attempted to perform *Monte Christo* at Drury Lane. They were hooted from the stage by a cabal, led by eminent literary men and actors, and were at last graciously permitted to perform at St. James's Theatre, which was treated as a kind of "No Man's Land," and supposed to be harmless because it was entirely patronised by the "swells" of the West End, who were not in touch or sympathy with the ordinary dramatic amusements of the day.

I can scarcely describe the slovenliness with which plays were performed, or the ludicrous managerial methods adopted to illustrate modern comedy. Such a thing as nature was scarcely known on the

stage. Old men of sixty played lovers of twenty-one, and the costumes of ladies of fashion came out of the theatrical rag bag. The stage wardrobe supplied the dresses, so the *ingénue* appeared in tumbled tarlatane, the leading lady in green or orange satin, and the dowager in the black velvet and ermine of Lady Macbeth. And what shall I say of the social position and influence of the actors and actresses of those days! Honest and excellent folk no doubt they were, but they so respected their calling, they so honoured their profession that, instigated by the leaders of their craft, they went down to the Crystal Palace year after year to show themselves in their true colours at a dramatic fête, in aid of a collection of isolated theatrical almshouses near the necropolis at Woking. The foundation stone of this wretched place was laid, it is true, with great pomp by the Prince Consort, and the Central Hall opened with ceremony by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, but this ill-omened institution died a lingering and ignominious death,

for it was supported by money squeezed out of the gaping public, who went to see actors banging drums, and shouting themselves hoarse at booths and Richardson's shows, and actresses posing as Laïs and Circe—luring men by the “wicked lightning of their eyes,” and selling kissed strawberries at a guinea a-piece!

But, lest you should think this picture of the stage in 1860 exaggerated, let me change from theory to fact. Let us take up the newspaper of the 1st of October, 1860, and see what is going on. The National Theatre of Drury Lane is closed, but it is advertised to be opened in a few days by the notorious E. T. Smith, who had been a policeman, a publican, and, as the manager of Cremorne Gardens, considered, by the virtuous public, a sinner. He was a Jack of all trades, and master of none. Nothing daunted the ambition of E. T. Smith, an eloquent and noisy type of the pronounced vulgarity of the day. He has a short season to get through before he starts his Christmas pantomime, so he announces Charles Mathews in his old plays,

he promises Charles Kean, and he states that he has in his possession a new drama, by Watts Phillips, which is even better than the Adelphi *Dead Heart*.

Buckstone, at the Haymarket, is at his wit's end what to do. He has not yet been induced to engage Mr. Sothern, of the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, who, report says, has made a wonderful hit at Laura Keene's theatre, in New York, as Lord Dundreary, in a serious play called *Our American Cousin*, written by Tom Taylor, for Jefferson, who is cast for Asa Trenchard. As yet nobody knows or cares much about Sothern, who is a myth, so far as London is concerned. But Tom Taylor is very angry that such pranks have been played with his work, and protests against the clowning of the young actor as Dundreary, although he has never seen him. So Buckstone falls back on placarding the return of John Brougham from America, in *Romance and Reality*, and the attraction of a new actress, Miss Amy Sedgwick.

At the Adelphi, Boucicault's *Colleen*.

Bawn has made a tremendous hit. It was only put up by Webster for a few nights, as a makeshift, but it is the work of the best dramatist of his time, whose busy pen has at last fallen from his hand, and whose *London Assurance*, close upon fifty years old, is a stage classic to this day. What matter if the plot was annexed from Gerald Griffin's *Collegians*, or that years before there had been an old East-end drama called *Eily O'Connor*. *The Colleen Bawn* was the excitement of the hour, and it deserved its success, quite apart from the author's "Sensation Header" into the stage water. Who will ever forget the roguish Myles-na-Coppaleen of Boucicault, or the sweet Eily O'Connor of his charming wife, Agnes Robertson? I see her now, with her black hair and her pale face, and her little scarlet cloak, singing the "Cruiskeen Lawn," and tempted to the fatal cave by Danny Mann, so admirably realized by Falconer. Every part was well filled, the Billingtons, Miss Woolgar, David Fisher, and C. J. Smith; and, much to his surprise, Benjamin

Webster—delightful and pathetic actor—was driven out of his own theatre, and forced to take refuge at Drury Lane.

But there has been another serious Adelphi departure. Madame Celeste has taken the Lyceum, where she is playing the Abbé Vaudreul, and has produced another play by Boucicault, *The Irish Heiress*, in which is announced the first appearance in London of a young actor from the provinces, whom you will all know. An actor, who, for thirty long years has delighted the playgoers of his time, and remains the freshest, the brightest, and, I may add, the youngest, of the leading actors of the day—Mr. Henry Neville. At Sadler's Wells they are playing *Cymbeline*, with Phelps, and Lewis Ball, and Charles Seyton, and Fanny Josephs—a delightful actress, whose death we have recently deplored—whilst at the Strand, Henry J. Byron has just written the first of those burlesques, *Fra Diavolo*, which are to make his name famous, and to immortalise Miss Marie Wilton.

Dear me! What, then, shall we go

and see ? There is a new farce, by Edmund Yates, at the Strand, called *Hit Him ; He has no Friends*, a most inappropriate title, so far as the author is concerned, for the dramatic profession has had no more loyal friend than the clever son of brilliant actor and actress—Edmund Yates. The delightful Lydia Thompson is enchanting young and old in *Magic Toys* at the Lyceum. Ah ! I know where we will go. We will go to the Olympic, where the greatest actor of our time is to be seen. Robson is to play to-night in the *Porter's Knot*, and afterwards in a new farce by Maddison Morton, called *A Regular Fix*. He is to make us cry and laugh in the same evening. All London is raving about The Great Little Robson, and has been raving about him for eight years. This extraordinary genius literally electrified his audience as Shylock, in Frank Talfourd's burlesque on the *Merchant of Venice*, so far back as 1853, and the next morning, in the *Times*, John Oxenford did not hesitate to pronounce Robson the greatest actor that had been seen on

the English stage since Edmund Kean. Since then he materially increased his fame by Desmarests, in *Plot and Passion*, and the wonderful Medea, again in a burlesque, and now he was bringing back the playgoers of the past in crowds to the theatre to see his infinite pathos in *The Porter's Knot* and *Daddy Hardacre*. The plays that Robson immortalized were as simple as A.B.C. *The Porter's Knot* was only the Prodigal Son, and *Daddy Hardacre* simply l'Avare, but how the actor could thrill, astonish and electrify with his marvellous changes ! At one minute the audience was sobbing, as the repentant son flung himself into his old father's arms ? At another, this versatile genius was making them shriek with laughter over the pathetic ballad of Villikins and his Dinah, in *The Wandering Minstrel*. A wonderful man this Robson ! As a child he had been put up on the tables of pothouses to recite emotional ballads and Shakespearean scenes. I saw him as a stock actor of the Grecian Saloon in the City Road. "Up and down the

City Road, In and out the Eagle, That's the way the money goes, Pop goes the weasel." But nobody thought much of Robson. At Dublin he made so little mark that he was afraid to come to London, and told Johnnie Toole so. Palgrave Simpson described Robson to me as one of the stupidest actors at rehearsal he ever met, apparently without an idea in his head, and no one on the stage knew what he would do at night. Walter Gordon, who played The Prodigal Son in *The Porter's Knot*, declares that, night after night, when he fell into his father's arms, and the audience was moved to tears by that wonderful cry of the heart, Robson himself was so little moved that he would try to make Gordon laugh with some trivial or commonplace remark about the tripe and onions that had been promised him for supper. And the wonderful part of it all was that nobody believed less in his own success than poor Robson. It killed him. He believed it was all a "fluke," and that it would not last. Genius as he was, he considered that he

was a fraud. He suffered from an unconquerable nervousness. On some nights it was as much as his companions could do to get him on to the stage, so fearful was he that he would break down. Then came the stimulants—and then came the end. I saw him last in *Camilla's Husband*, as a travelling tinker, a perfect wreck of his former self. His memory and vitality all gone. Alas, poor Robson! Let us ring down the curtain here! Like Edmund Kean, his nervous force was too great for his little frame. But when he acted he seemed to grow before your eyes. His transcendent power magnified him. He towered head and shoulders above his fellows. Would, indeed, that many of you here who have never experienced the thrill and shock of really great acting had ever seen Frederic Robson. He was only a burlesque actor, but what a genius—only a pigmy, but what a giant.

Within a short month the unexpected arrived at last. It was on the 4th November, 1860, that Augustus Harris, the father of our Augustus Druriolanus—I

beg pardon, Sir Augustus Glossop Harris, Ex-Sheriff of the City of London—announced the first appearance of the French romantic actor, Charles Fechter. It was at the Princess's Theatre, and the character in which he was announced to appear was *Ruy Blas*, by Victor Hugo, one of the finest and most finished melodramatic creations of the century. Fechter has made love as no actor has ever made love on the stage in the memory of man, save, perhaps, Leigh Murray; he has played Shakespeare; he has revived *Porte St. Martin* melodrama; he has posed as a second Lemaitre; but as the lover-lackey in *Ruy Blas* he was absolutely at his best. In the last act, where, with soft and cat-like steps Fechter dodged round the stage, avoiding the fury of Don Salluste, and with a crafty lunge whipped his enemy's sword out of the scabbard and became the master instead of the slave, was a superb effort. Never was a scene so splendidly "timed"; it went with the beat of clock-work—regular, with a pulse and a throb—an art wholly lost, I venture to think, in

our modern melodramatic acting. Well, almost in an instant, Fechter came, saw and conquered. Supremely ignorant as English play-goers were about French art and artists in those days, nobody had apparently heard of Fechter, and yet he was, in his way, a Parisian idol in the days of giants. He was the original Armand Duval to the Marguerite Gautier of *Mademoiselle Doche*, in the *Dame Aux Camelias*, and when the play was over on the first night, and all the critics were in doubt whether to applaud the novelty or to execrate it, they came up to Jules Janin and asked his opinion. "Well," he said, "all I know is that the play made me cry like a calf, and that is quite good enough for me. The scenes that bring tears from my hardened eyes will impress the public." And so it has proved to this very day.

But Fechter, though he was unaware of it, had a mission to perform in this country. He had to break down the unnatural, stilted, artificial barriers that the Macready school had left. He had to be the pioneer of natural acting in this coun-

try. People were sick and tired of the groaning, grunting, guttural school. They wanted some one to talk in the voice that God had given him, and in the manner that appealed to human nature. Augustus Harris, the father, clever, animated, liberal, familiar with the best French acting, was the very man to encourage Fechter. What he had done for the opera he intended to do for the stage; and I doubt not that his clever son before his career is over, will do for the stage what he has done for the opera. Fechter, the elected champion of natural acting, met with encouragement, but not in unexpected quarters. His chief patron was Charles Dickens, the master of nature in fiction, and he soon gathered round him a band of devoted followers sworn to naturalise the stage, and to encourage free trade in art. *Ruy Blas* succeeded beyond anticipation, but when the next move was announced there was a perfect howl of execration. Fechter, the Frenchman, was advertised to play *Hamlet*, to play the Prince of Denmark in a

flaxen wig, to discard the black velvet, the bugles and the funereal feathers, to make Hamlet a man, and not a mouthing mountebank. The old play-goers raved and stormed, and would not be comforted. The new generation applauded with both hands, not for the mere sake of opposition, but because they were really interested in the new Hamlet. It is too late now to revive the old discussion. I was very young at the time, but I own I was one of the fascinated Fechterites. I had been through a course of Shakespeare under Charles Kean and Samuel Phelps, at the Princess's and Sadler's Wells, but with all its false intonation, all its occasional levity, all its melodramatic trick, I sat spell bound under Fechter, and seemed to understand *Hamlet* for the first time. If Fechter failed dismally as Othello, he failed in good company; but as Iago he triumphantly succeeded, and though he was, before all things, a stage lover and a melodramatic hero; though we shall remember him with delight in the Lyceum days of the *Duke's Motto* and *Bel Demonio*,

when he made love to the charming Kate Terry, and revolutionised our clumsy stage arrangements, I for one am not sorry, in the interests of English art, not only that Fechter came among us, but that he dared to play Shakespeare in a natural manner.

From that moment the tide changed. We began to visit Paris, and to see different phases of art; we welcomed foreign artists to our shores without a murmur; we, who wrote about plays and players, were not hustled out of our employment because we would not be the slaves of a set of effete and incompetent fossils; newspapers that before looked upon the drama as a matter of as little importance to the public as a dog fight, and devoted mere brief paragraphs to theatrical novelties, began to devote important space to the daily record of the drama. From the early success of Fechter, the French actor, I venture to date what I have heard called the birth-time of natural acting in England, the renaissance of English dramatic art.

For my own part, I am inclined to think that full credit for his share in this dramatic revival was never given to my old friend and faithful comrade, Tom Hood, a poet, and the son of a poet dear to every Englishman. He was a desperately hard-worked man at the time, quill-driving at the War Office all day, and burning the midnight-oil at night—not a dramatic critic by profession, and yet passionately fond of the play—but Tom Hood had an influence among the younger writers and artists of his day that cannot be overrated. He was the most unselfish and least jealous of men. He loved to get his friends about him to talk shop, and to encourage one another in their various callings. Every Friday night of his life, though not particularly blest with this world's riches, he gave a cheery Bohemian supper-party, to which the best fellows in the world were invited. Who that was privileged to attend them can have forgotten Tom Hood's "Friday nights" in South Street, Brompton, where after a pipe and music, conversation, and poetry readings, we sat

down to a homely meal of cold joint and roast potatoes, and discussed all the wonderful things that we youngsters intended to do in the future. Was it a wonder that we were true and loyal to our old comrade, Tom Robertson, who was the brightest of the conversationalists present, and the best of company. Nowadays the cynics would call it "log-rolling."

Well, and if it were? We had to build our encampment in our new literary colony, and if some of our brethren rolled a log for us, we tucked up our shirt-sleeves and rolled a log for them. Marie Wilton was an old family friend of Tom Hood, Robertson was the friend of all of us, and what harm came of it, if we rolled logs for the new Prince of Wales's theatre and the new school. The cynic may sneer that the friendship of the Hoods and Bancrofts, and Robertsons and Hares, and Holkers, and M'Connells, and Broughs, *cum multis alius*, made a "boom" for *Society*; but the "boom," such as it was, led its author from despair, and fired him with youth and hope to write *Ours*, and *Caste*, and

School, and to make his name famous, and to lift up, to the advantage of the stage, such managers and actors as Bancroft and Hare, and to send forth as the representative of the *once* band of brothers such a writer as W. S. Gilbert.

Let us quickly change the scene. I must hurry you on and arrive at the end of another ten years, one of the most important and vital periods in the life of the modern drama. The old world has changed, giving place to new. Theatres have multiplied and been made comfortable; the stage has been swept, garnished and put in order; players come to London, and are made welcome, from France, from Germany, from Italy, from Holland, from America; newspapers record the daily life of the players, and chronicle the productions of dramatists as one of the most important elements of news. New blood and spirit have been infused into the once feeble drama.

We have arrived now at the 1st of October, 1870. To-night, and for many years past, one of London's most fashion-

able audiences is rushing up to a miniature little playhouse, in a dirty street off Tottenham Court Road, to see the last of Robertson's plays at the Prince of Wales's theatre. It is called *M.P.*, and as usual the bandbox of a theatre is filled to suffocation. What a change! The theatre, no longer the despised "dusthole," in a squalid neighbourhood, is now the chosen rendezvous of the *élite* of English society. The manageress, no longer a charming little burlesque actress, with the sunny smile and the twinkling feet, but the directress of the accepted house of light comedy, and herself without an equal in the school of homely nature. The author, no longer a disappointed bohemian, the idol of his friends and the enemy of fortune, but suddenly transformed into the most successful dramatist of his time. How has it all come about? How has it happened? I think I know. Robertson's success was, in a great measure, due to his own charming talent, but in a greater measure to the wonderful accident of opportunity. The Bancrofts, Hare, Robert-

son, Gilbert, Merivale, and the rest of them, came at the right time. A protest was needed against artificiality, slovenliness, untidy, scamped, unreal work! The people cried out for nature, and these gifted artists and authors were the pioneers of the natural school. It was not so much the plays that caused the revolution as the harmonious and natural method of playing them. It is sometimes claimed for Robertson that he would have succeeded at any time and under any circumstances, and he is quoted as the instance of the broken-hearted man, a victim of managerial cabal, who might have died with a dozen unacted masterpieces in his desk! Don't believe one word of it. I knew Robertson in his despondency and his success. I was with him when his first successful play, *Society*, was refused with scorn by Buckstone and ridiculed by every member of the Haymarket company, and I am perfectly certain that had *Society* been produced at the Haymarket of those days and been damned, as it would have been damned, Robertson in all probability would never

have been heard of again, and the gaiety of a nation would have been eclipsed. Robertson waited long enough for his opportunity, but fate was kind to him and to us for delaying her favours so long. It is sometimes inaccurately said that the Prince of Wales's Theatre was started for the sole purpose of exploiting the despised Robertson. Nothing of the kind! The Prince of Wales's was started in order to allow H. J. Byron to write comediettas and Miss Marie Wilton to dance in burlesque. They had made money for others: they wanted to make some for themselves. Robertson was an after-thought, not an original inspiration. Robertson was the happy idea of a clever woman who believed in him, but only when Byron failed as a manager, and when it was proved that no one wanted burlesque in the Tottenham Court Road. The success of the new school was in its novelty, and its novelty was its nature. Robertson, in his simple and manly little plays, spoke from the heart and wrote the most directly natural dialogue that had been heard on the stage for

years. Mrs. Bancroft, and gradually all her company, spoke these words like human beings and not like padded automata. The theatre was cosy: the men who had to act gentlemen, dressed like gentlemen, and not as mountebanks: the women were not supplied from the theatrical rag bag, but were fitted by fashionable milliners. They were all earnest, clever, loyal and educated. There was an artistic aim or intention and a rare harmony in execution, and so this little company, despised as it was, jeered at as the tea-cup and saucer school, the butt and ridicule of the groaners and grunTERS and mouthing tragedians, who since then have been shown the door, started the healthy reform whose signs are visible to this day on every stage throughout the length and breadth of this country. Genius is a matter of accident; but art is a matter of training. We cannot manufacture the one; but we can cultivate the other. A reproach from the shoulders of English art was certainly lifted when the modern stage had the guidance of artists like

Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft and their gifted and brilliant successor, Mr. John Hare.

And what else do we find of prominent interest on the 1st of October, 1870? Chatterton, of Drury Lane, has taken heart of grace and having employed and paid Charles Lamb Kenny to fulminate, in a letter to the *Times*—of course signed Chatterton—his famous epigram that “Shakespeare spells ruin and Byron bankruptcy,” Chatterton, the ex-boxkeeper, posing as an author of epigram and forgetting his slovenly, slipshod ways, which were becoming intolerable, is doing good work with the dramatization of Scott’s novels by Andrew Halliday and the aid of the rare beauty of a lovely woman, who was within an ace of being a great artist—Adelaide Neilson!

Never was a woman born with such indomitable courage as Adelaide Neilson, with the wondrous eyes. Her love for her art became a passion. She was a Juliet unequalled in her time and a Shakespearean student of rare intelligence. Alas! She left us all too soon, but the

gods must have loved her, for she died young, died in the fulness of her beauty and in the ripeness of her good heart, died beloved alike by her friends and her rivals, leaving behind her what so few successful artists do in memory of the goodness of Providence—a charitable dole, which will be administered to her sisters in sorrow and her brothers in affliction, in her everlasting memory.

Once more, what is theatrical London doing on 1st October, 1870? Mrs. John Wood is calling rehearsals at the St. James's Theatre for a revival of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* such as shall astonish the artistic world; and she has interested the veteran Planché in the scheme. Planché, who had assisted Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews in the same kind of work years before, but had lost heart during the decadence and vulgarity of the dramatic sixties! Boucicault is still writing Irish dramas for the Princess's. It is *The Rapparee* this time: the Lyceum is closed and it is a case of exit Falconer, a clever, long-winded but

unreliable man. Talking of Falconer reminds me that he was the author of the very longest play on record—a play that was duly written, rehearsed, performed, but, alas, was never concluded. The play was called *Oonagh*: the scene was Her Majesty's Theatre. It was nearly two o'clock one memorable morning when, in the company of a few more conscientious critics, I was, for my sins, listening to the interminable talk and dreary platitudes of our merciless Irish author. At last, in a desperate moment, urged by despair and a feverish thirst, the irritated stage carpenters solved the difficulty. They deliberately pulled a carpet suddenly from under the feet of the last loquacious characters, and down they all went prone on their backs. Before they could struggle up and go on talking, down went the curtain, too! That was the end of *Oonagh*. It was also the end of Falconer. By the mercy of Providence, he wrote no more plays. But to return to 1870. Tom Taylor has seduced Compton from the Haymarket, and the old

Haymarket comedian, the best Shakespearean clown I ever saw, has failed as a star in a story of the lake country at the Olympic. Edward Terry, Harry Paulton and Amy Sheridan are playing burlesque at the Strand. Phelps and Ryder may be seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Queen's, in Long Acre, a theatre since destroyed, but was then owned by that droll genius, Henry Labouchere, M.P.—and that's the Truth!

But the chief excitement of the moment is the success of a play, by James Albery, at the Vaudeville, called "The Two Roses," and the theatrical world is talking of a most remarkable and vividly natural presentment of a selfish *parvenu*, by an actor already of note—one Henry Irving. The Vaudeville, if not an off-shoot from the Prince of Wales's, is a replica of the same scheme. Montague, most easy, natural and unaffected of actors, the idol of the ladies, has come here from the Tottenham Court Road. James and Thorne, twins in Strand burlesque, have almost given up singing and

dancing, and taken to modern comedy. But Irving is already spoken of as the coming man, the actor of whom great things might any day be expected. True, he went back to Manchester, "sent down" like a disappointed schoolboy in the early Fechter days, at the Princess's, but Boucicault, with his quick appreciation for talent, fetched him back to play Rawdon Scudamore, in *Hunted Down*, at the St. James's, under Miss Herbert's management, and since then the young actor has touched nothing that he has not adorned. He succeeded with Miss Herbert; he succeeded at the Queen's. What performances they were of Robert Redburn, in the *Lancashire Lass*, and Bob Gassitt, in *Dearer than Life*. Charles Dickens, an excellent judge of acting, raved about them. He succeeded brilliantly as Chevenix, in *Uncle Dick's Darling*, when associated with his devoted friend, Johnnie Toole; and now Digby Grant is the talk of all London. But, admirable as Irving was as an artist, no one in the wide world, least of all his

friends, imagined, that by temperament or accident, he could ever be a leader of men. For once, the world was entirely in the wrong. For years, as I have said before, the stage was without a leader. Suddenly, accidentally, mysteriously, the opportunity came, and with it the man. The man was Henry Irving. Again, let me correct an erroneous impression. It has been said that Manager Bateman, with unerring instinct, prophesied the great future of Irving, and risked his all at the Lyceum to exploit the young actor. Manager Bateman did nothing of the kind. He took the Lyceum to exploit his daughter, Miss Isabel Bateman, and he chose as his dramatic trump card, not Henry Irving, but George Belmore. So little did the enthusiastic Bateman gauge the capacity of Irving, that he engaged him to play a spoony, sentimental lover in *Fanchette*, Bateman's first luckless venture at the Lyceum.

Old "Colonel" Bateman was a tough nut to crack, but he was as good and honest a fellow as ever lived, with a love

for his own kith and kin, that one time almost amounted to mania. I am not old enough to remember the days of the "Bateman children" at the St. James's, when two clever infants spouted Shakespeare to an admiring audience. But I perfectly remember the first success of Miss Kate Bateman, as Leah, at the Adelphi, and the critical war that it created. Opposed were the Batemanites and the anti-Batemanites, and the Bateman cause was espoused by any amount of Jerrolds and Blanchard Jerrolds, *et hoc, genus omne*. I know that "Colonel" Bateman was lucky enough to secure the services and the unswerving fidelity of Dr. Joy, who had been Charles Kean's factotum, and the worry of every editor in London and the provinces. Dr. Joy did not "work the press," but he simply worried editors to death. He called so often and lodged so many complaints, that an editor would say to his critic: "Look here, I admire your independence, and what you say is, no doubt, as true as the light of heaven; but, for God's sake, relieve me from the visits

of Dr. Joy ! Stifle your conscience a little bit when you are writing about Charles Kean, or Dr. Joy will be the death of me ! ” He was the “ Old Man of the Sea ” to every newspaper editor, and he stifled opposition with dogged persistency. Old Bateman knew the worth of Dr. Joy, who worried patient editors about Miss Bateman, exactly as he had worried them about Charles Kean.

But though Bateman did not create the success of Irving, it was Irving that pulled Bateman out of the fire of failure. The Lyceum management was on its last legs, when Irving obtained permission to put up a translation of *Le Juif Polonais*, by his friend Leopold Lewis, called *The Bells*. Nobody believed in it; it was a last chance. But Irving understood himself better than even we, who had studied him so closely, understood him. He loved the weird; the mysterious; the psychological. He was an adorer of Hoffman. He recited Hood’s “ Eugene Aram,” in private and in public, as it had never been recited before, thrilling his audience to

the marrow. Still we were not prepared for the wondrous success of *The Bells*. I was one of the few in a comparatively empty house on the first night, but I shall never forget the wonderful effect of the play and the actor. Of the success of the experiment there was no doubt. The play was new and alluring; the actor had triumphed and was suddenly lifted at one bound above his contemporaries. I thought so that night, and what I thought was printed next morning. My account of *The Bells* was received with blank astonishment and incredulity, and I received a sharp reprimand from my editor, the best friend I ever had in the world, for my prophetic utterances concerning an actor who was comparatively unknown.

“Clemmy, my boy!” said my kind old friend to me—he was more a father than a friend. “Clemmy, my boy! you are engaged on this newspaper as a dramatic reviewer, and not as a sporting prophet. Your ‘tips’ may be admirable, but, believe me, dramatic ‘tips’ are

dangerous. They hang heavily on your hands and you cannot shake them off." I know he was right. But among my many failings—and my best friends are never weary of reminding me of them—is a constitutional inability to forget the existence of a buried bone. Like the sagacious and domestic dog, I pull every rag of meat off my particular bone, bury it, but, alas! I never forget it! There is no bone in all the world sweeter to the dog, and the dramatic critic, than the buried bone unearthed. We think we have forgotten it, but by some mysterious instinct we return to the grave of our mouldy grievance. And now that I know my dear old friend was right—on principle—though I am perfectly certain it is foolish to be "wise before the event," still I return after all these years to my favourite bone, and I say, with that self-satisfaction that is so deplorable, but, alas! so human, "Well, I *did* prophecy; I *was* wise before the event; I *did* say that Henry Irving was the coming man, and my 'tip' was right." However, I was soon

forgiven for my impetuosity, and my editor, ever generous, became Irving's most devoted friend through life. In a very short space of time, the name of Irving was in everyone's mouth; he was soon announced to play Hamlet, and old Bateman, glowing with success, took the young actor to his heart, and firmly believed, to the hour of his death, that he, and he alone, had discovered the actor of the day. No; Irving discovered himself. He waited long for his opportunity, when it came he grasped it. The stage had found its lost leader; let us see what he did with his power and ascendancy.

And now that we have arrived—all too briefly and imperfectly, but it was inevitable, unless I determined to weary you for thirty years instead of so many minutes—now that we have arrived at the dawn of what will be known in aftertime as the “Irving Era of Dramatic Art,” let us see how far the soil has been tilled that we found so ragged, untidy, and full of weeds, in the deplorable year of 1860. In the first place, we have become liberal

and generous, instead of exclusive and parsimonious. The actor no longer moans and whines about the foreign actor coming over here to "take the bread out of his mouth;" the newspaper proprietor does not shut his columns to all record of contemporary art that is not of home growth; the newspaper critic is not dismissed because, in the name of the public, he welcomes to our shores all that is excellent in art, of whatever kind or whatever country. I heard the other day of a disappointed American actor complaining to his countrymen of the impossibility of obtaining a footing in London for him and his plays. Ladies and gentlemen, he was perfectly right. There is no footing in London for any artist, or any dramatic work, that is not of the very best. Our standard is very high, but we are proud to maintain it, and to let it be known that to make a success in London is the envy of the greatest dramatic artists in the world. For the discontented and the disappointed, who value themselves at their own estimate, there is no remedy;

way to cheer the German players from Saxe Meiningen, and the Dutch players from Amsterdam, and the greatest Italian actors of the age, Ristori, and Rossi, and Salvini, giving to one and all our warmest enthusiasm and our most cordial praise. No; in the face of these we will not tolerate indifferent art or common clap-trap from any quarter of the civilized globe. We will have the best, and nothing but the best.

Nothing but good has been the result of this English liberality. In 1860 we were saying we wished the English stage could be as good as the French. In 1890 we are saying we wish to heaven we could get such well-ordered theatres, such taste, and such an ensemble of art at Paris theatres as we do in London. The sight of the greatest artists in the world has not depressed our own art. It has elevated it and stimulated it to fresh effort; and who shall say that in the time to come this feeling will not be reciprocal? America has given a cordial welcome to our Adelaide Neilson, our Henry Irving,

our Ellen Terry, and our Kendals. Who shall say that one day Paris will not wake up to the truth that we are threatening to beat them at their own game? If Frenchmen doubt it, let them go and see *A Pair of Spectacles* at Mr. Hare's Garrick.

And now, though I may be venturing on a dangerous subject, and may be accused of treading too near the borderland of egotism and personality, I feel bound to say, for the honour of my fellow-workers, and in proof of the devotion I have for my own profession, that much of this liberal and independent feeling is due to the sturdy and valiant independence, in all matters concerning the drama of the day, of the English press and its conductors. We cannot please everybody. We are bound to be cruel only to be kind. We are accused, as we must be accused, of motive, and favouritism, and want of fair play, and bias, and heaven knows what. But who are our accusers? *We* fight in the open. Why do they hide behind hedges? Our names are well-known.

Let us know theirs. If we were venal, our life in journalism would not be worth a week's purchase : if we were systematically cruel or unfair, we might whistle to the winds before we attracted one moment's attention. If those who employ us give us their confidence, and if those who read us grant us their sympathy, we can afford to despise the inevitable irritation of the disappointed artist, be he dramatist or journalist. It soon passes away. But what we who write are justly proud of is this : that the English newspapers are looked upon in matters of art as the fairest and least prejudiced newspapers in the world. Ladies and gentlemen, we are none of us infallible. We may all make mistakes, but I claim, on the part of my fellow-workers in our honourable profession, at least this—that our mistakes are unintentional, and that our motives are pure.

From the date of Henry Irving's accession to power and influence, a new wave of prosperity seemed to dash on the shingly beach of dramatic enterprise. He was the kind of manager who did not

talk much, but he performed a good deal. He did not spend his time in arguing, but he acted. He was soon found out to be no vapouriser or theorist, but a worthy, practical successor to Macready, Phelps, and Charles Kean. It was no longer a reproach to us that Shakespeare was never seen on the English stage. Irving could not manufacture genius, but he yielded to none of his predecessors in high intelligence, the rare gift of stage management, and a reverence for his art; and he had this additional advantage of the modern scientific appliances, which he quickly turned to good account on the modern stage, setting an example which his fellow labourers were not slow to follow. If the worshippers of Macready instanced a memorable performance of *As You Like It*, as a thing never to be forgotten, and the admirers of Charles Kean quoted his revivals of the *Winter's Tale*, and the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the wondrous London procession in *Richard the Second*, as unexampled in their memory, the modern playgoer was

able to remind them that *Hamlet* was played at the Lyceum for over 200 nights; and he fairly asked if, in the days of Macready, or Kean, or Phelps, the stage ever saw such marvellous and artistic pictures as the cathedral scene in *Much Ado About Nothing*, or the weird magnificence of the Lyceum *Macbeth*, or the brocken scene in *Faust*, or that exquisite translation into another world, when Ellen Terry, most beautiful and ideal of women, stood at the Pagan altar in the glare of heathen sacrifice, as Camma, in the *Cup*? It is said now, as it ever has been said, that literature is divorced from the drama. If it be true—and I disbelieve it—it is not Henry Irving who can be put down as the co-respondent in this theatrical divorce case! He has revived Shakespeare, he has revived Goethe, he has produced plays by Alfred Tennyson and Lord Lytton. He has given us a stage poet in Mr. W. G. Wills, whose *Charles the First*, and *Eugene Aram*, and *Olivia* will be accounted literature in the after ages. Recently he has produced,

with his accustomed liberality and good taste, and poetic sympathy, that fate-haunted drama, *Ravenswood*, borrowed from Sir Walter Scott by Herman Merivale, who also has given the stage literature in the *White Pilgrim*, and *All for Her*, and many another play which is bound to live.

And now, one serious word more on this debated point on the union of literature and the drama. The "superior person" insists that our modern drama has no literature at all; and the old playgoer nods his venerable head, and wipes away a furtive tear, as he recalls the palmy days that gave us the bombast and the stage fustian of Sheridan Knowles. On this point I cordially avow I am at direct issue with the old playgoer. If the *Hunchback* and the *Love Chase* are to be classed as literature, I will beat the old playgoer at his own game. Have you ever read attentively in print the condemnation of the traitor, Moray, and the parting of wife and husband in the *Charles the First* of Mr. W. G. Wills? Why, there is more

real poetry in that play, a finer literary sense than will be found in all the masterpieces of Sheridan Knowles put together. I have spoken already of Herman Merivale, who may be deficient in stagecraft, but not in literary grace and elegance; but can it be maintained that literature and the drama are divorced, when at the very hour at which I have the honour to address you literature was honoured by Mr. Pinero when he gave us his beautiful play, *The Profligate*? Will the "superior person" deny to Mr. Henry Arthur Jones the quality of literature, when he reads, as he may read to advantage, the dialogues contained in *The Middleman* and *Judah*? No; literature and the drama are lovers, and cannot be separated. They may have their tiffs, their misunderstandings, and their unhappy hours; but the course of their true love ever must run smooth. "*Amantium iræ amoris integratio est*"—The quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love. I can imagine the Drama saying to its lover, Literature, in the words of Judah Llewellyn, the hero recently despised by

the "superior person," the hero put on a lower scale than Master Walter and the pinchbeck heroes of Sheridan Knowles:—"Not for everything in the world will I part with you. Heap them all up—fame, riches, wealth, peace of mind, length of days, honour, friendship, every joy of body, mind and soul, that the heart of man can desire—put them on one side, and your love on the other. I will not have them. I don't want them. I want your love. I will not barter you away for all the world contains!"

And then the despised Literature might answer: "Oh! but think what I am!"

"You are yourself," would be the Drama's quick reply. "You are yourself. Whatever you are, I will make myself that I may be like you. I will deserve you, be sure. I will be your mate. If you are evil I will be evil too, so that at the last I may taste every drop of suffering that you taste, your every pang, and keep your soul side by side with mine for ever!"

But it was not only at the Lyceum that we found the drama in a healthy and prosperous condition, when at last the slovenly era had made way for artistic enterprise and good taste. The romantic and Shakesperian drama were devotedly cared for, both at the little Court Theatre and the larger Princess's by Wilson Barrett, an excellent lieutenant in the cause of a higher dramatic intelligence. The national theatre of Drury Lane, which had become a bye-word and a scandal, woke to unaccustomed prosperity under the rule of Augustus Harris, who, though appealing to a wider public and a less sensitive taste, was ever in the van of progress and the determined opponent of the coarse, vulgar and squalid form of art that had preceded it. His public did not ask him for the highest, but he gave them of the best, and where the ambition of this man of determined energy points may be seen in the triumph he has achieved in the cause of the lyric drama, having rescued defunct opera from the ashes of decay.

When the time came for the Bancrofts to finish their good work, and, having amassed a fortune by honourable means, to take their early, much regretted, but well earned retirement, they left the cause of pure comedy safe in the hands of their old comrade, John Hare, one of the most finished artists of our time, and a stage manager almost unrivalled, they saw the Haymarket, which they had re-established, safe in the hands of one of a still younger school, who is the owner of an ambition without restraint, and the preacher of a policy of progress that should satisfy the most despondent of our modern pessimists.

Dating from 1870, and on through a course of anxious years, we notice on all sides a decided advance, in comparison to what had gone before. Theatres multiplied, and the best art invariably brought prosperity to the manager. If the public wanted elaborate farce instead of the old Adelphi screamer, they got it of the very best under the guidance of Charles Wyndham, a comedian of the very first

class: if they wanted homely domestic drama, pure and wholesome, a happy mingling of laughter and tears, they never got a better supply than at the Adelphi under the management of the Gatti's, and with the aid of that wholesome humourist, George R. Sims, and the experienced Henry Pettitt. Whilst a perfectly new form of entertainment, unknown to our ancestors, the one known as a Gaiety entertainment, and the other as a Savoy entertainment—the one a sublimated variety show, and the other a new form of English Opera—flourished exceedingly for scores of years, and will hand down to posterity the names of John Hollingshead and George Edwardes, and the wonderful triumvirate, so soon to be severed, of Sullivan and Gilbert and D'Oyley Carte—a combination that, in an unsentimental age, has substituted for English ballad original extravagance, and has wedded ingenious topsy-turvydom to church music.

So much then for the past. Described inadequately, I fear: ineffectively, I know:

but, I earnestly trust, not unfairly. We face one another to-day on the threshold of the future. We have arrived at October, 1890, what that future will be, who shall say?

If we are to believe all we hear, we are on the eve of an important dramatic revolution, and we have certainly no lack of advisers to tell us how wrong we are to follow our own impulses, and how right we are to be guided by the professors of the new school of thought. Every science and every art has its grammar and formula. We must all learn our A, B, C, before we can read. But the drama, that most complex of all arts, is to have no grammar—no formula at all! It is to be absolutely without convention, for we are told it is convention that is strangling the stage. Since the days of Shakespeare we have got on pretty well with the study of human nature, and some of us actually find that human nature is pretty much the same now as when he, the master, drew Hamlet and Othello, Lear and Romeo, Macbeth and Mercutio, Imogen and Des-

demonia. But instead of human nature as we know it, or as we thought we knew it, we are to submit ourselves to the guidance of sham philosophers, faddists, or what the Americans call "cranks." Our worship is to be paid to the diseased imagination—not the sane one. We are to offer our homage to the unwholesome studies of human life by Ibsen and Zola, and Tolstoi, and not to re-garland the immortal brows of the poet of all time. We are to sit in the dissecting room, and on the students' bench, to see the surgeon wield the knife, to watch as he divides the veins and arteries, and to be faint with the sickly smell of dissolution; not to go out into the green fields, to breathe the fresh air, to revel in the glories of creation, and to brush off the dust and stains of our outward life with the green leaves of poetry and the sweet flowers of imagination. On the stage of the future every subject is to be discussed, for the actual is life, and the first place, so we are told, is to be given to the horrible, not the beautiful.

There was a time when a certain exploded quality, known as "good taste," hushed the discussion of certain subjects in general society, and, as in general society, so especially on the stage. Prominent amongst those subjects was religion. But all that is old-fashioned; our serious stage, our comic stage, our burlesque stage, are peopled with priests and parsons, with bishops and deacons, who, through the mouths of authors and managers, proclaim the most astounding heterodoxy. In fact, our modern managers airily protest their independence by publishing their unblushing ignorance of matters of fact. It is only fair, however, to say that the serious priests of the modern stage are, if anything, more ludicrous than the comic curates.

There was a time also when not only Cyril, the tipsy student in Tennyson's poem, but the clever author on the stage, was hushed down when he sang of "Moll and Meg, and strange experiences unmeet for ladies." But our modern Idas are supposed to have no such scruples as

their cultured predecessor. They are to be taken to the play to hear a conversation between a flighty wife and a dissolute doctor on the fit of silk stockings and the curse of hereditary disease. They are to enjoy the spectacle of a son detailing to his mother how, from personal experience, the sins of the father's are visited on the children, and they are to be edified with the picture of Nana in her night-dress coming down to the footlights to deliver the "tag" of a hideous drama, with her poor white face seared with the ghastly ravages of small-pox.

In fact, if we are to believe all we hear, there is on all sides a passion for change. "The old order changeth, giving place to new." In 1860 we found managers complaining that no public attention was being called to the amusements of the people, and that the drama was dying for want of public support. In 1890 we find managers dictating to newspapers as to when and when not their public entertainments shall be criticised. In 1860 we found managers courting the public

favour. In 1890 we find managers rushing into print, and volleying their thunders in magazine articles, if any public writer dares to protest against the vulgarisation of old comedy, or to hint that out of our mass of theatres one at least might be managed by an independent person who had no personal interests of his own to study, and no axes of his own to grind.

But, then, we are told that we have now to deal with an educated public, and that now-a-days Society has patronised the stage. Perfectly true, but, so far, I cannot see that the Education Act has materially made its mark on the amusements of the day, and, so far as I can judge, although Society has kindly taken under its wing an amusement which it cannot do without, Society has not taught the ambitious amateur that the royal road to success on the stage is through the royal school of experience and the thorny path of practice; nor has Society, that so patronises the stage and wishes it so well, set the laudable example of coming

into the theatre when the curtain rises, and not when the entertainment is half over.

I confess, however, that, fortified by my own personal experience, I am extremely sceptical as to the ultimate success of any such revolution as I have hinted at. Cabals of this kind are perpetually arising; but common sense ultimately prevails. Coteries and faddists and "cranks" of every kind ultimately yield to the force of human nature and to the public voice of the majority. It is only the voice of the Ibsenites crying in the desert that maintains, with sublimated egotism, that the majority is always wrong. To the minority that is always right, in its own estimation, we are not likely to yield in connection with any form of art, least of all where our public amusements are concerned. No; heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

There never was a time when the stage was not said to be in instant need of reform, and when that reform was not promised out of the desks of disappointed

dramatists. It is the old cry now as it has been from time immemorial. Our stage has no literature except the literature that is perpetually promised by the unacted and never comes. Our artists are invariably less competent than their predecessors. Our managers are so blind to their own interests that they systematically refuse to produce plays that are bound to make fortunes, in the opinions of those who have written them; and our critics, when they are not absolutely incompetent, form themselves into a "ring" to suppress literature, to advertise the incompetent, and to canonise the commonplace. But, ladies and gentlemen, the stage of this, as of any other, age, will prosper and grow in dignity, in beauty and in influence so long as you all, as separate individuals, are determined to do your utmost that it shall rise and not fall, and that our pleasure shall consist in the worship of the beautiful and the pure, and not in degrading art to the level of the ugly and the base. My own experience is that nothing that is manly and brave and generous;

nothing that is chivalrous in man or tender and true in woman; nothing that springs from the heart and from the better impulses of our nature ever fails to meet with its cheer or sympathetic approval. Whilst, on the other hand, no sham philosophers or false guides, or mere exponents of cleverness or eccentricity can ever extract a cheer for what is base, or mean, or ugly, or degrading to our better nature. We want no censors, or dictators, or moral policemen to clear the way for the royal progress of ennobling art. We want the help of the individual, each one of you, man and woman alike, for in the aggregate of the individual is the public voice. We want your passions, your sensations and your hearts.

In conclusion, do not listen to me; do not pay heed to my empty words or to my unimportant voice. Listen, I beg you, to the pregnant words of one of the greatest of our teachers, still happily amongst us. Listen to one who has done more for the dignity and the purity of art, and cried out louder than his fellows for the sup-

pression of vulgarity and narrowness of thought, the curse of cant and the pride of the Philistine. Listen, I beg you, to John Ruskin.

“Having, then,” says Ruskin, “faithfully listened to the great teachers, that you may enter into their thoughts, you have yet this higher advance to make—you have to enter into their hearts. As you go to them first for clear sight, so you must stay with them that you may share their just and mighty *passion*. Passion or sensation, I am not afraid of the word, still less of the thing. You have heard many outcries against sensation lately, but I can tell you it is not less sensation we want, but more! The ennobling difference between one man and another—between one animal and another—is precisely in this, that one *feels* more than another. If we were sponges, perhaps sensation might not be easily got for us; if we were earth-worms, liable at every instant to be cut in two by the spade, perhaps too much sensation might not be good for us. But being human creatures *it*

is good for us ; nay, we are only human in so far as we are sensitive, and our honour is precisely in proportion to our passion.

“You know I said of that great and pure society of the dead that it would allow ‘no vain or vulgar person to enter there.’ What do you think I meant by a ‘vulgar person’? What do you yourselves mean by ‘vulgarity’? You will find it a fruitful subject of thought; but, briefly, the *essence* of all vulgarity lies in want of sensation. Simple and innocent vulgarity is merely an untrained and undeveloped bluntness of body and mind; but in true, inbred vulgarity there is a dreadful callousness which, in extremity, becomes capable of every sort of bestial habit and crime, without fear, without pleasure, without horror and without pity! It is in the blunt hand and the dead heart, in the diseased habit, in the hardened conscience that men become vulgar; they are for ever vulgar, precisely in proportion as they are incapable of sympathy—of quick understanding—of all that, in deep insistence or the

common but most accurate term, may be called *tact* or *touch faculty* of body and soul: that *tact* which the mimosa has in trees, which the pure woman has above all creatures; fineness and fulness of sensation beyond reason—the guide and sanctifier of reason itself.

“Reason can but determine what is true. It is the God-given passion of humanity which alone can recognise what God has made good!”

[The foregoing remarks formed the basis of a Lecture delivered at the Birkbeck Institute on 10th October, 1890. I hope eventually to enlarge upon them in a complete volume of Dramatic Recollections and Experiences.—C.S.]

DRAMATIC TABLE-TALK.

MEMORIES! well, there will be plenty of them crowding upon the brain whenever we take our seats to see the old *Green Bushes* at the new Adelphi. My own theatrical recollection does not take me back to January 27, 1845, for I was only three years old at the time, and certainly cannot conjure up Mrs. Yates or Mrs. Fitzwilliam; but in after years, many a time and oft, I saw tall, handsome Charles Selby, and Paul Bedford, C. J. Smith, and Cullenford, and, of course, Madame Celeste. But I have many Adelphi memories of a later date—of the days when J. W. Anson, who compiled almanacks and financed the Dramatic College, sat down below us, and passed us into the theatre; of well-remem-

bered times when I used to visit Johnny Toole and Paul Bedford in their Adelphi dressing-room, where they hobnobbed together after the fashion of Wright and Paul Bedford; of days when old fossils like W. H. Eburne played dashing young sparks at the age of sixty, or thereabouts, when Phillips played impossible flunkeys, and Bob Romer was induced one memorable evening to take a Benefit at the Royalty, and play *Othello*.

Shall I ever forget that *Othello* evening—Bob Romer playing *Othello* as seriously as a judge, with a black face and his well-known staccato, jerky utterance; Jeff Prowse, with his merry, twinkling eyes; and Bill Brough, with a contingent of “Savages,” led by Harry Leigh, as members of the Venetian senate; and Tom Robertson literally rolling on the floor with laughter at the back of the dress-circle. “Don’t laugh so, Tom,” I said to him, as he literally shrieked at the interpolated remarks of the audi-

ence to Bob Romer's address to the senate, "you will do yourself an injury!" "I can't help it, Clement," he roared out, with laughter, and tears in his eyes. "Oh, how good Providence is to have allowed me to be here to-night! Listen to them, Clement—oh, listen to them!" "True, I have taken away this old man's daughter!" ("Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Bob!") "True, I have married her!" ("You scandalous old reprobate, I will tell your wife!") But the fun was not over when blackened Bob returned, amidst shouts and cat-calls. Another entertainment was in store for us, as Horsley, a sober solicitor, and Director of the Crystal Palace, the hero of the "hippopotamus in the tank," at the Arundel Club, and the man who "did the seasons" by facial expression when he was fooled to the top of his bent by Byron, Sothern, and Ned Murray, who could draw out old Horsley better than anyone—this Horsley, on the memorable *Othello* night at the Royalty, promised to sing "When this old hat was new," attired as a village yokel, in top-

boots and a smock frock. Conceive a decorous, bald-pated London solicitor singing a comic song in this guise, to an accompaniment of yells and cat-calls, and greeted at the close with large bouquets of carrots, turnips, and radishes, which were literally flung at his head by "the boys."

And, of course, Benjamin Webster is a very vivid Adelphi memory. I was by his side at the laying of the first stone of that ridiculous Institution, "The Royal Dramatic College," at Woking, for which the public were cruelly fleeced, particularly at the horrible Fancy Fairs held every year at the Crystal Palace, which did their best to degrade the dramatic profession to its lowest depth—days when pretty actresses kissed strawberries for half-sovereigns and went about hawking their own photographs—days when actresses chose to associate themselves in public with the riff-raff of the *demi-monde*, in order to support at the Dramatic College a dozen old grumbletons,

who cursed the place and all its associations, and longed to be smoking a pipe in the parlour of a Strand tavern, instead of maundering out their existence within a stone's throw of the Woking Cemetery. But the Dramatic College was Webster's pet hobby. He hated anyone who opposed him in this fruitless scheme of misdirected charity, and never spoke to my old friend, Mr. Frederick Ledger, of the *Era*, for years, because the *Era* conscientiously and, as many think, rightly, opposed the Dramatic College and the Crystal Palace revels tooth and nail.

I was at the memorable dinner of the Drury Lane Fund, at Richmond, when Benjamin Webster took the chair as Master, and astonished us all by solemnly getting up to propose the first toast, his memory having almost gone, and said, "The King! God bless him!" He thought he was living in the days when George the Fourth was on the throne of England.

But the strangest and most vivid recollection I have of Webster was a year or so later on, when, once more a guest of the Drury Lane Fund, I was driven one Sunday morning to call on the old man at his house, at the back of Kennington Church. We found the old gentleman—his head as white now as driven snow—sitting, at over eighty years or age, with his youngest child upon his knee. The infant was the exact image of him—in fact there was a double likeness, for, hanging on the wall, over the chair on which the old man sat, was a picture of Benjamin Webster when he was an infant at his own mother's knee. The child in Webster's lap and the child in the picture were as like as two peas. Whilst the company were assembling for the day's outing—since we started off for our delightful drive into the country from Webster's house—Terriss and I strolled into the garden. I shall never forget it. The grass in this neglected place had grown up as high as our waists, the statuary was falling into decay, and in an old dilapidated shed was

the carriage that years and years before had driven Madame Celeste from the Adelphi, and the wheels of the tumble-down old barouche were still covered with mud—the mud and mire of years before. It was a poem of recollection and desolation.

I suppose you know that it was Mr. W. S. Gilbert who invented the phrase “Adelphi Guests,” in the admirable burlesques of popular plays that were printed every week in *Fun*, when under Tom Hood’s direction; but perhaps you do not know that it was mainly through these articles and the vigorous attacks made by the young literary and journalistic lions of the Arundel and Savage Clubs that was started the “renaissance” of dramatic art at the old Prince of Wales’s Theatre in the Tottenham Court Road, resulting, as every one knows, in the birth of the Robertsonian plays and the founding of the fortunes of Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft. Anything more slovenly

than the stage adornment of those days was surely never seen, and it may be imagined that the dramatic critics of the renaissance period were cordially detested by the Websters, Ansons, Churchills, Chattertons, and Kinlochs, who were content to allow matters on the stage to get from bad to worse, and did their best, but unsuccessfully, to pare the claws of the young lions of journalism who advocated the study of French dramatic art, then at its best, deprecated the absurd theory that to see a French play well acted was "to take the bread out of the mouth of the English actor," and secured the desirable end by which stage decoration and stage dressing were properly attended to. The dressing of Mr. John Hare, Mr. Bancroft, and others, at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre, in the early days, was quite a revelation.

Countless and varied are my recollections of the Lyceum in the brilliant but ill-starred days of Charles Fechter. Mr. Irving has

recently communicated to the *New York Herald* the full cast of Mr. Herman Merivale's new verse play, founded on Sir Walter Scott's novel, "The Bride of Lammermoor." The last stage version of this romance was written by Palgrave Simpson, and called *The Master of Ravenswood*. I have a distinct recollection of two things in connection with this gloomy play. First, I can recall the weird effect of the last scene, and the rising tide that swallowed up Edgar of Ravenswood, a stage illusion of remarkable moment at the time. And secondly, there is present before me the picture of a charming Lucy Ashton, in Miss Carlotta Leclercq, particularly in the last act of the play, when the actress gave a "shiver" that literally thrilled her audience. A most romantic and interesting performance was Fechter's Master of Ravenswood, although at that time he was not quite at his best. Worry and trouble had begun to mark him for their own, and had he not been manager as well as actor he might not have broken down so soon. But when all is said and

done, it will surely be admitted that he was the best romantic actor that the present generation has seen. For my own part, I have never seen any one make love like Fechter on any stage, English or foreign. Those who were ever lucky enough to see his *Ruy Blas* can understand what I mean. His love scenes were as passionate as the last duel was infinitely dramatic and fine. I shall never forget Fechter in his prime, when he played Hamlet at the Princess's, and when he produced the *Duke's Motto* and *Bel Demonio* at the Lyceum. But as time went on matters changed. Fechter lost his money—and his head. He quarrelled with all his old friends—amongst them the very staunchest, Palgrave Simpson—and became, as they say, “too big for his boots.” This is a calamity that has befallen other popular “actor managers” before and since. Edmund Yates has pathetically described the end of Fechter in his delightful recollections. Some day there will be plenty more Lyceum memories to relate.

Far later comes a Lyceum recollection in connection with *The Bells*, often revived by Mr. Irving, who created Mathias. It is sometimes erroneously believed that Mr. Irving was specially selected by Mr. Bateman as a "star actor" for the Lyceum after his brilliant success as Digby Grant, in the *Two Roses*, at the Vaudeville, though Mr. Irving's talent was the constant talk of connoisseurs long before he appeared at the Vaudeville at all. Old Bateman really took the Lyceum to star his own daughters, and if there was to be a male star in that firmament it was George Belmore. Why, in the first play produced, *Fanchette*, Irving was cast for a romantic lover. Bateman did not discover Irving, for Irving discovered himself. The whole Bateman scheme was a failure, and they were at their wits' end to know what to do, when Irving suggested a play that was in his possession. It proved to be *The Bells*, translated from the French by a friend of Irving's, Leopold Lewis, a literary solicitor and "free lance," who edited a clever paper called *The Mask*

with Alfred Thompson. *The Bells* was put up as a *dernier ressort*. Nobody believed in it but Irving. He understood his strength better than his friends did. I shall never forget the first night, or the impression the acting made on a scanty audience. Even Dutton Cook, who was not given to eulogy, -warmed up with enthusiasm. For my own part, I remember, I "let myself out," feeling that what we had seen was very much out of the common, and must sooner or later strongly impress the public. But I got into a little scrape at first for my enthusiasm. I was sent for by my editor, and best friend that man ever had, and asked if it was wise to write in that strain of such a play, and of a comparatively unknown man. Some playgoers were very conservative in those days. "Who is this Mr. Irving," I was asked, "and what has he done? To tell you the truth, I have never heard of him!" Well, after that night he was heard of pretty often, and has never ceased to be heard of since. After that moment, when sudden prophecy

proved correct, I was never more asked, "Who is this Mr. Irving?" And Bateman, with all the energy of the old showman, turned round and "made believe" that *he* was the real discoverer of the actor who, by means of *The Bells*, had leaped into prominence. When *Hamlet* was produced at the Lyceum on October 31st, 1874, Mr. Bateman wrote:—

"Those who have a voice potential on art matters have fixed unanimously upon Mr. Henry Irving as the young English actor best fitted to be the interpreter of the great English dramatist's masterpiece. That the manager shares this belief the manner in which the play is cast and mounted will distinctly show."

There is nothing like worshipping the rising sun, is there?

The Olympic Theatre in Wych Street, Strand, has been pulled down, and with it, buried in the dust, are memories! Where shall I begin them? With Robson, "the Edmund Kean of our time"—with days when I saw the "great little man," whenever home for the holidays, as Desmaretz,

in *Plot and Passion*; as Medea, in Brough's burlesque, but so like the real thing that it was almost tragedy; as Shylock, in Talfourd's skit on *The Merchant of Venice*; as Daddy Hardacre; as Sampson Burr, in *The Porter's Knot*—and what a marvellous change from tragedy to farce as Jim Baggs, in *The Wandering Minstrel*; as Pawkins, in *Retained for the Defence*; and as the deaf ostler, in the *Boots at the Swan*, a capital farce never played now—but it wants an actor who is skilled in the art of comedy. Then come other memories—of the early appearances in London of Henry Neville, a charming young actor, who first distinguished himself with Miss Hughes (Mrs. Gaston Murray) in a play called *The World of Fashion*; of the first night of the *Ticket-of-Leave Man*, which was consecutively represented at the Olympic for four hundred and six nights; of the early charm of Lydia Foote and of Kate Terry; of the days of Horace Wigan and the cantankerous George Vining, who brought an action for libel whenever he was adversely criticised; of Ada Caven-

dish and her *New Magdalen*; and Miss Gwilt—and so on through difficulty and struggle to despair and dissolution. And now behold a new Olympic Theatre altogether!

Talking about Robson and *The Porter's Knot*, it will be remembered that in it occurs a most pathetic scene, when the old father takes his repentant son to his arms, a scene that made the whole audience sob, so splendidly was it acted. Walter Gordon, who played the son, has often told me how Robson tried to make him laugh every night when the boy rushed to his father's arms. Robson was not really agitated, but was whispering to Walter Gordon, *sotto voce*, "I wonder if my old woman will give me tripe and onions for supper, eh, Walter?"

Lydia Foote, and her appearance as the pathetic heroine in Tom Taylor's *Ticket-of-Leave Man*, bring back a recollection. Of course, you all know that this famous play was cleverly

adapted from a French drama by MM. Brisbairre and Nus, called *Leonard*. Well, in those days nobody dreamed of paying a French author a "red cent" for the use of his property. It was a case of first come first served. The first who came in this instance was Frampton, of "Queen Victoria's Own Theayter," over in the New Cut, and he it was who first produced *The Detective*, or the *Ticket-of-Leave Man*. Would you believe it? Nelly Farren was in the company at the time, and Ada Harland—a delightful dancer, since married to a celebrated American author—and Elise Holt, and others subsequently famous. But the joke is that Lydia Foote was the Cockney boy, Sam Willoughby, in the original Victoria version, though she played the sentimental heroine in Tom Taylor's Olympic version later on. The boy at the Olympic fell to Miss Raynham, one of the best girl-boys I have ever seen on the stage. Ah me! they are all nearly gone, save the evergreen Henry Neville, Lydia Foote (where is the charming actress hiding herself?),

and Mrs. Stephens. Horace Wigan (the detective), George Vincent (Melter Moss), John Maclean (Mr. Gibson), have all gone before ; but the pleasant face of Green Jones (Mr. Soutar) may often be seen in the lively Strand, busy at work as ever.

I forgot to mention Miss Herbert in the Olympic memories, though she is better known in connection with the St. James's, in the days when Henry Irving came to London for the second time, and made such a hit as Rawdon Scudamore, in Boucicault's *Hunted Down* (the "Two Lives" of Mary Leigh). What a lovely girl she was in the days of the Olympic burlesques, and what a hit she made in *Retribution* (1856), in which Alfred Wigan played Count Priuli—a play so strong and striking that I wonder it has never been revived by Mr. Irving at the Lyceum. And did you ever hear how Kate Terry first came into notice when a very young girl indeed? They were playing, under Miss Herbert's manage-

ment at the St. James's, the first version of Sardou's *Nos Intimes*, written by Horace Wigan, and called *Friends or Foes*. Miss Herbert was cast for the leading part—created by Mrs. Kendal in *Peril*—and Kate Terry was the *ingénue*. One night—I remember it well, for I was present on the occasion—Miss Herbert was taken suddenly ill, and Kate Terry took the lead. She electrified the house, and from that moment her fortune was made. From the theatre in King Street she was taken away by Tom Taylor to be the leading lady at the Olympic, and she was the star there for many years in the early days of Henry Neville, Charles Coghlan, and H. J. Montague. I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Herbert the other day at her charming villa, just outside Monte Carlo, and she was looking as well and as young as ever. With the cheerful assistance of the bright memory of dear “Mrs. Charley” (Mrs. Charles Mathews), we recalled many old recollections of the Olympic and St. James's Theatres.

I had almost forgotten that it was at the Globe Theatre that Henry J. Montague produced the first play I ever wrote. It was called *Tears, Idle Tears*, an adaptation of a French one-act drama, *Marcel*. This was a very sombre tale, and I know that on the first night the interest in it was almost wholly spoiled by the terrific coughing of my old friend, John Oxenford, the critic of the *Times*, who occupied a box, and drowned every word on the stage by his obstinate catarrhal affection. But *Tears* was destined for other calamities of a dismal kind. The plot turns on the accidental murder of a son by his father, who subsequently goes mad, and is restored to reason by the appearance of Child No. 2, born in the interval. You would hardly believe it, but on scarcely one night the story of the play failed to conjure up in the audience some harrowing recollection³ or domestic calamity. Neither I nor Mr. Montague had any idea that so many children had been accidentally shot by their parents, but certain it was that someone went into a fit or burst

out into hysteria, almost every night on which the drama was acted. Montague could stand it no longer—his theatre was becoming as sad as the Morgue. "We must take it out of the bills, Clemmie, my boy," he said. "I am very sorry, for I like the part." So out it went.

But there is another memory in connection with John Oxenford's cough, which became terrible as the winter advanced. One night he was at the old Queen's Theatre, in Long Acre, coughing as usual, incessantly, whilst George Rignold was acting. The cough irritated Rignold to madness, but he did not know (how could he?) who was the offender. At last he came forward and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am extremely sorry, but it is absolutely impossible for me to act until that amiable old gentleman ceases to cough, or obtains a lozenge. Either he must cease to cough, or I must cease to act. We cannot both be on in one scene!" The coughing ceased, and the play went

on. But when the curtain fell, some one came to Rignold and said, "George, do you know what you have done? Do you know who the amiable old gentleman was that you turned out of the theatre?" "No, indeed, I don't; but he was a beastly bore." "Well, old boy, it was John Oxenford, of the *Times*, who came to criticise your performance." Rignold collapsed; but he got a good notice all the same. There was no spite about John Oxenford!

It was at the Olympic that I first saw George Vining, one of the most sensitive and litigious actors that ever lived. At that time—it was in the Robson era—he used to play dashing young men about town with a hard rasping voice, long before he became manager of the Princess's Theatre, and first brought the lovely Adelaide Neilson to light in the *Huguenot Captain*, though Miss Neilson's first actual appearance in London was at the little Royalty, in Dean Street, Soho, where she

played Juliet, after a successful *début* at Margate. But to return to George Vining. He came back to the Olympic to play Count Fosco in *The Woman in White*, by Wilkie Collins, and the inability of the critics to value him at his own estimation nearly drove him mad. Vining was not a bit like Fosco, but Wilkie Collins good-naturedly said he was, in order to keep the peace—and his play going. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. He indulged in law-suits as freely as did Charles Reade, and I fear that in those days I cost my employers a considerable amount of money, inasmuch as every adverse criticism, when submitted to an enlightened British jury, was then considered to be libellous. The twelve honest men and true, forgetting that the critics were invited to come and give their opinion, good or bad, and ignoring the fact that there could be no possible personal malice in their strictures, fell back upon the old definition of libel—that it was exposing a man to hatred and contempt—and decided, with the aid of a specious advocate, such as Serjeants Parry or Bal-

lanyne, that anything, criticism or not, that tended to take the bread out of a man's mouth, or to do him a personal injury, was, *ipso facto*, libellous. Apply the same test now, and every adverse criticism ever written is libellous.

This reminds me how often actors, managers, and authors have scored off dramatic critics when a disputed point was submitted to a jury. The ruffled feelings of George Vining were certainly consoled by a money payment by Mr. James Mortimer of the *Figaro*, one of the first papers that made a feature of independent criticism, and one of the most loyal editors under whom I have ever served. I only know this, that Mr. Mortimer was publicly hissed and execrated for years by the pit in all places of public amusement for words that I myself had written, and he sternly refused to allow me to put him right with the public. He was responsible, he said, and he did not intend to fling any of his staff into the jaws of the howling mob.

Such nobility of conduct is very rare, and it has never been forgotten by me. I take the first opportunity of testifying to Mr. Mortimer's unflinching loyalty to those he employed in happier times.

Sam Emery, the father of Miss Winifred Emery, was another actor who kept a private solicitor to defend his professional reputation. On one occasion my friend Arthur A'Beckett, in the *Glowworm*, said that Emery was prompted, in a piece by Palgrave Simpson, called *The Watch Cry*, a dreadful failure at the Lyceum in Fechter's time. It was perfectly true; Emery was prompted. The author, Palgrave Simpson, got into the box and swore that the entire statement was true. But there was counter swearing on Emery's side, and poor A'Beckett was cast in heavy damages for telling the truth, and was thereupon adjudged guilty of a legal libel; and there are other celebrated cases of grossly unfair distortion of the libel law. Charles Reade obtained damages against the *Morning Advertiser* because my

friend Richard Lee said that some of the dialogue in *Shilly Shally* was capable of a double meaning. The *Times* critic—Mr. Wicks—said the same, and so did I; but Charles Reade forgave the *Times* and the *Illustrated Times* because they belonged to influential proprietors, but he “skinned” the poor *Advertiser*. And so it has ever been, down to the time when Mr. Herman Merivale obtained damages recently against the *Stage* for words that were innocence itself compared to what I myself have written as a critic of plays and players for the last quarter of a century. The jury generally look at the matter from a petty tradesman’s point of view, and judges a writer guilty of libel if he has injured any one in his trade, although the tradesman asks a candid opinion on the value of his goods. It is against the small and un-influential papers that the litigious man gets the pull. It is then a case of “Hit him hard, he has no friends.” I have long advocated a kind of trades union of journalists, to protect the craft against these attacks, based on the boycotting system.

If journalists and critics stuck together they would never allow a litigious actor to be mentioned again, good, bad, or indifferent, provided always that the criticism was *bonâ fide*, and devoid of malice, spite, and spleen. When Emery obtained damages against a journalist for saying he was prompted, I suggested in print, and in justification of independent criticism and my brother journalists, that his name should never be mentioned again. I did exactly the same thing in the case of George Vining, who, having asked for an opinion, publicly placarded it as puerile nonsense, separating the text from the context, and holding the critic up to "ridicule and contempt." But I spoke to the winds in those days, when nearly every newspaper was afraid of its life of managers, and sold its soul for an advertisement. Chatterton for years tried to keep me out of his theatres, and even to refuse my admission-money, when on behalf of the public I protested against the slovenly ways of the Drury Lane, Adelphi, and Princess's *régime*, and fought with

others for the renaissance. We proved too strong for them all at last.

The wise policy of leaving your advertising antagonist severely alone has recently proved its excellence. Periodically the curious world is startled with a violent attack on the dramatic critics. It occurs as regularly as an epidemic, but there is no danger in it. The sole cause of it is a hunger for self-advertisement. Sometimes a disappointed journalist tells the world that we sell our independence for "chicken and champagne"; sometimes a disappointed dramatist tells the ill-informed that we dictate our criticism at theatrical bars. Why in the world should anyone take the trouble to cross swords with such unworthy antagonists? One cannot fight with a sweep without blackening one's fists? It is a transparent dodge to raise a very insignificant personage into importance. If you really want to punish such a man—ignore him. That will make him dance to a different tune. The ignored actor, sooner or later, will

whine for recognition ; the disappointed dramatist who curses the critics will, sooner or later, ask their aid.

Henry J. Montague is a very pleasant memory indeed. He was not a great actor ; he was not a particularly well-educated man, but he had the most charming manners of any young fellow I have ever met. Wonder of wonders, he was as popular with men as with women. No one was jealous of him. He had no enemy in the world—save his luxurious and careless self. His tact was marvellous, but he had no vestige of a heart. He was all things to all men, and felt nothing deeply. I have seen him come into a drawing-room or into a club-room, and each person with whom he shook hands so heartily was impressed with the idea that the person in question was the only one in the wide world he wanted to see. So guileless did he appear, so earnest, so confidential, that all the world liked him. I wonder if any one really loved him ? Yes, one woman did ; the woman who was true to him in

poverty, prosperity, and adversity—and he broke her heart !

The first strong patron of Harry Montague was Dion Boucicault. The dramatist took up the young, good-looking actor, and he invited him to play the junior counsel in the *Trial of Effie Deans* at the Westminster Theatre (now Astley's); and afterwards Montague found staunch friends in Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, at whose house in Pelham Crescent, Brompton, he and I were constant guests. We were boys then—but how we enjoyed the talk and fun of Planché, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews, and Palgrave] Simpson, and Byron, and “Rosey” (Arthur Sketchley), when we were lucky enough to be invited to one of those celebrated Sunday dinners, at which our host presided in dressing-gown and smoking-cap—his favourite form of evening dress! “Ask the boy,” said Charles Mathews to his young and pretty wife, who was the queen of hostesses in those days. “He does not talk much, but he is such an excellent

listener, and his laugh does me good." And so it was that your humble servant, a junior clerk in the War Office, Pall Mall, began to feed on dramatic anecdote and study theatrical character. Yes! I was a good listener for many years. One dinner led to another. On one Sunday it was at the Charley Mathews', in Pelham Crescent; on the next at the Frank Matthews', in Linden Grove, Notting Hill; on a third at the Walter Gordon's, in Thurloe Place—and here it was that I met the veterans, and such youngsters as Montague, Irving, and Jack Clayton. There are very few of them left, and such as remain are sadly changed by time or circumstance.

One of the most welcome faces of the past was always Harry Montague. He was at his brightest when he played Lar-kins, in *Woodcock's Little Game*, at the St. James's, in the Charles Mathews days. He was at his best when he sat among the ruins of the old Alte Schloss, at Baden Baden, in Robertson's *Play*, and made love to Marie Wilton. But he left us,

and chose the new country instead of the old. Those who literally worshipped him, like Tom Smale and George Delacher, were left behind, and he preferred Broadway to the Strand, new friends to old. A charming, careless, delightful butterfly! Such was Harry Montague. He had no stamina, physical or moral, but he possessed a very singular and delightful charm.

I was away from England when poor old Tom Smale died recently. I call him "old," but it was only the affectionate term of his friends. Scant justice has been done to his memory. I know it is the old story—he was his own worst enemy, and so on; but there were fine points in the character of Tom Smale. When he made a friend he stuck to him through thick and thin, through evil repute and good repute. There was a dogged devotion to his masters by Tom Smale that I always admired. He had three such masters in my memory, and for each he would have gone through fire and water. The first was George

Vining, the second Harry Montague, the third Charles Wyndham. Smale's devotion to Montague was quite pathetic. He could scarcely talk of him without the tears welling to his eyes, and yet, in the end, Montague was as careless of this staunch loyalty as he was of the friendship of men, the devotion of women. Smale was dragged into theatrical society, and spent his money freely with his friends when he had it. But he gave way, and I, for one, can forgive the weakness of a man whose heart was as tender as that of any woman. He had far nobler qualities in him than many who loved to scorn and pass him by. In the days when "we were boys, merry, merry boys," Tom Smale was as popular as any in a set of essentially "good fellows." It was said of him, some time before he died, "that he had become impossible." Well, perhaps he had. But I prefer to remember the days when he was not only possible, but a bright, cheery, and affectionate fellow, a charming companion, and a loyal friend.

There is nothing like work to deaden care, so surely Miss Ada Cavendish, when she lost her husband, my dear old friend Frank Marshall, was well advised to get into harness again, which she promptly did when Miss Harriet Jay produced a new poetical play by Robert Buchanan at the Adelphi. It is strange that my earliest recollections, both of Frank Marshall and Ada Cavendish, should have been in connection with the little Royalty Theatre, where, as I previously told you, Adelaide Neilson made her first London appearance as Juliet—an event which, by the way, was duly chronicled by your humble servant in a paper called the *Glowworm*, which had about a dozen advisers, including Frank Burnand, Arthur A'Beckett, Tom Archer, Wybrow Robertson, Captain Bachelor, and who shall say how many more besides? The old *Glowworm*, like so many more excellent newspapers, was eventually extinguished; but it came to light again as the "Vaudeville Theatre," erected by Wybrow Robertson on the site once occupied by editorial offices and print-

ing presses. I must have been a "miscellaneous writer" in those days, for in addition to criticising the coming actress, I was told off soon after by editor Burnand to describe the elevation to the Archbishopric of Westminster of the Rev. Monsignor Manning—now Cardinal—at the Catholic Church of St. Mary Moorfields.

I suppose one of the first occasions I ever saw Frank Marshall, then a clerk in the Audit Office, Somerset House, was as a constant visitor to the Royalty, where he sat steadily, night after night, to roar with uncontrollable laughter over *his own farce, Mad as a Hatter*. The theatre was quite empty, but there sat Frank applauding his own jokes in the most comical fashion possible. But it was Frank Burnand who first made the fortunes of the restored and revived Royalty—Miss Kelly's theatre, as it was once called—with his classical burlesque, *Ixion*. It was a clever bit of satire, but, in addition to that, a regular beauty show. Who can have forgotten Ada

Cavendish, as Venus, with golden hair, Lydia Maitland, as Apollo, David James, as Mercury, or the liveliness of Jenny Willmore, and Felix Rogers, who sang a parody on Dr. Watts's hymn, "Let dogs delight to bark and bite," and was encored about a dozen times a night? The theatre was managed for the Misses Pelham by Mrs. Selby, once a well-known actress in the burlesque days at the Strand, but who retired when it was rudely hinted that she was too old for burlesque by some impudent young fellows who threw her a wreath of immortelles. It was a coarse jest, and made a great stir at the time.

But the first signs Ada Cavendish ever gave of strong dramatic talent, as apart from the Royalty beauty show, was in a play by Frank Burnand, called *Madame Berliot's Ball*. I remember as if it were yesterday a fine exit she had in that play, which startled the audience, who had not expected such dramatic fire. I know I rushed off to write about it somewhere, for I was always writing, and never get-

ting paid for anything I wrote in those salad days! One of my first appointments was as dramatic critic, literary reviewer, and social leader writer for a paper called the *Victoria Press*, which had its offices up a blind alley close to Temple Bar. Its proprietor was a man called Fergusson. I thought my fortune was made, as I was guaranteed a salary of £5 a week! It ended with my lending my editor and proprietor a five-pound note, but I never received a farthing for loan or salary. I have Fergusson's I O U to this day. I fear it is not worth very much. I expected to meet with some domestic sympathy after this first financial disaster; but, alas! my father roared with laughter when he heard the tale, and compared me to Moses, in the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

But to return. Ada Cavendish, after her Royalty experiences, soon became as famous as Adelaide Neilson herself. Was she not for many years manageress of the Olympic, after she made another hit with Sothern, in Tom Robertson's *Home*

(*L'Aventurière*)? She has done an immense amount of work, both in the Shakesperian, romantic, and modern drama, but I always think the best thing she ever did was Miss Gwilt, the orange-haired heroine in the *Armada* of Wilkie Collins. It was in this play that two now celebrated actors came conspicuously to the front, Leonard Boyne and Arthur Cecil. I shall be reminded, of course, of the *New Magdalen*; but I consider it one of the most hateful and unjust plays ever written. It is opposed to all one's sense of justice and moral right.

How curious are the first memories of actresses who have since become famous. My first recollection of Mrs. John Wood is a pair of black legs sticking out of a barrel! She was playing Miss Miggs in a version of *Barnaby Rudge* at the Princess's—and a dreadful failure it was; but failure or not, I have a vivid recollection of the black legs sticking out of the barrel, like pigeons in a pie.

The old Princess's Theatre was my nightly haunt for many enjoyable weeks, of which I have a delightful recollection. By this time I was a paid and professional critic on the *Sunday Times*, as distinguished from an amateur and cheated scribe, and I strove my utmost to educate myself up to the dignity and knowledge of my companions on the critical bench, of whom I stood in mighty awe. Fancy a lad of about twenty-two daring to sit in judgment on plays and players by the side of John Oxenford, Bayle Bernard, E. L. Blanchard, Frederic Guest Tomlins, Stirling Coyne, Charles Dunphie, Leicester Buckingham, John Hollingshead, &c. It makes me tremble to think of my rash impertinence even to-day. Well, it was at the Princess's that I tried to appear less ignorant than I was about Shakespere and his stage traditions. Walter Montgomery at that time played nearly every leading character in the Shakesperian drama, and I watched him open-mouthed from a stall, tucked up in a corner by the orchestra. I suppose by instinct I had

attached myself to the school of progress, in contradistinction to the school of fossils, for I soon joined a debating society in order to defend Fechter's Hamlet, at which the old school gnashed their teeth and swore terribly ; and my earliest dramatic essays for the *Sunday Times* were in ardent praise of Stella Colas, as Juliet, a performance that was execrated by the lovers of Helen Faucit and the Macreadyites, who hated foreign actors as they did the old gentleman himself.

At the mere mention of Fechter or Stella Colas, critics like Mr. Henry Ottley would literally foam with rage ; and Stella Colas and her acting were cut to pieces by George Henry Lewes. Even to mention a foreign actor in those days was to endanger one's position on any theatrical paper—that is to say, a journal that lived on theatrical advertisements. Protection was rampant and bigotry pronounced, but by pounding away we got free trade, and the memorable visit of the Comédie Fran-

caise to London. Who will ever know what good was done to our stage by those pioneers of progress, Lewis Wingfield, Herman Merivale, Palgrave Simpson, Joseph Knight, and many more? "Free trade in art, and the abolition of fossils": that was our cry in those days, when Alfred Wigan was known as the only "gentleman" on the stage—and a worse dressed gentleman I never saw. We have no Robson now, no Leigh Murray, no actress that can quite compare with Adelaide Neilson; but, as a whole, the acting all round is infinitely better now than it was twenty-five years ago; whilst, as to production, the Irving period is miles ahead even of the Charles Kean period; as, indeed, is the Bancroft period in comedy superior to the Vestris and Charles Mathews period. At least, "them's my sentiments."

To have been present at the *début* of a father and son on the stage is a strange experience. I rub my eyes and fancy I must be growing old. Am I? Well,

I don't feel it, and that is the chief thing to be considered ; but, dear me, I have seen and sat out an incalculable number of plays since the first night of *Society* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, when John Hare took all literary and dramatic London by storm ; and on a miserable afternoon, at Richmond, I witnessed young Gilbert Hare make his successful *début* at the new Richmond Theatre, in Mr. Sidney Grundy's comical play of *Mamma*.

I shall be told—and very properly told, I have no doubt—that John Hare's first appearance as an actor was not in London at all, and that even in London he appeared several times at the Prince of Wales's Theatre some time before he “created” Lord Ptarmigan. Quite true. I am perfectly aware of it. The young actor and brilliant pupil of Leigh Murray, one of the best and most finished actors who ever trod the stage, appeared in Liverpool, some time before he came to London, in a wild drama by Watts Phillips, called *The*

Woman in Mauve, which failed dismally in London when it was brought to the Haymarket, though it was artfully advertised for weeks before by a placard with these simple words engraved upon it, "Watch this Frame." The public, excited by the novel advertisement, did watch the frame, and eventually they discovered inside it the announcement of *The Woman in Mauve*, by Watts Phillips, at the Haymarket. This was one of Sothern's dodges; but neither the acting of Sothern nor Buckstone could make the play go, though it was the forerunner, as it were, of Gilbert's plays of eccentricity and topsy-turvydom. But to return to John Hare, who relinquished his part to old Buckstone, and came up to London with young Sidney Bancroft from Liverpool to join the Marie-Wilton-cum-Byron army as a new recruit. This is the point I am coming to. I don't suppose that before the curtain drew up on Robertson's *Society*, any one in London had heard a word about, or knew there was such a creature in existence as, John Hare. Before the curtain fell the young actor was

famous, and every one who had social or newspaper influence was talking about him.

There was a great gathering of the light literary division at the little theatre in Tottenham Court Road on the first night of Tom Robertson's new play. It was dear old Tom Hood, who was our leader then, who sounded the bugle, and the boys of the light brigade cheerfully answered the call of their chief. I remember that on that memorable night I stood—for there was no sitting for us on such an occasion—by the side of Tom Hood at the back of the dress-circle. The days of stalls had not then arrived for me. Suddenly as the play advanced there appeared on the stage what was then an apparition. Bancroft had delighted us with his cheery enthusiasm and boyish manner, for he was the lover in this simple little play—well-dressed, and, for a wonder, natural. Think what it was to see a bright, cheery, pleasant young fellow playing the lover to a pretty girl at the time when stage lovers were nearly all sixty, and

dressed like waiters at a penny ice-shop. Conceive a Bancroft as Sidney Daryl in the days when W. H. Eburne played young sparks at the Adelphi, and old Braid was the dashing military officer at the Haymarket. But what astonished us even more than the success of young Bancroft was the apparition that I spoke of just now. A little, delightful old gentleman came upon the stage, dressed in a long, beautifully-cut frock-coat, bright-eyed, intelligent, with white hair that seemed to grow naturally on the head—no common clumsy wig with a black forehead line—and with a voice so refined, so aristocratic, that it was music to our ears. The part played by Mr. Hare was, as we all know, insignificant. All he had to do was to say nothing, and to go perpetually to sleep. But how well he said nothing; how naturally he went to sleep. We could not analyse our youthful impression at the time, but we knew instinctively that John Hare was an artist. Had *Society* been accepted at the Haymarket—which, luckily for Tom

Robertson, it was not—the part of Lord Ptarmigan would have been played by old Rogers, or Braid, or Cullenford. Chippendale and Howe would certainly have refused it as a very bad old man. No; Tom Robertson's lucky star was in the ascendant when *Society* was refused by the Hay-market management with scorn. Had it failed there—as it must have failed, for it was not a good play—I believe my old friend would have “thrown up the sponge” and never worked for the stage any more. The refusal of *Society* by Buckstone, and the keen and penetrating intelligence of Marie Wilton, who was determined that Tom Robertson should succeed and that his plays should be acted, were the turning-points in the doubtful career of a broken-hearted and disappointed man.

I don't think I ever remember a success to have been made with slighter material than that given to Mr. Hare. And it was a genuine success. We of the light

brigade could not work miracles. We might have written our heads off, and still done no good for the new school. Luckily there was at that time, as critic of the *Times*, a man of keen and penetrating judgment. John Oxenford knew what was good as well as any man, and he knew how to say it into the bargain. He was not a slave to old tradition, and when he had a good text, what a wonderful dramatic sermon he could preach. Luckily, also, the new school had the constant support and encouragement of the *Daily Telegraph*, whose leading proprietor and director—Mr. J. M. Levy—never missed a first night in the company of his artistic and accomplished family. All that was liberal and just and far-seeing was in favour of the new Robertsonian departure—of a dramatist who was not old-fashioned and dull, and of actors so new, so fresh, so talented, as Bancroft, Hare, and their companions. The heavy brigade of influential writers, led by John Oxenford, patted the new movement on the back ; the light division, led by Tom Hood and others,

lent their enthusiasm to the good cause. Gilbert, Prowse, Leigh, Millward, Archer—all of us, in fact, who knew Robertson, and appreciated his talent—were the first to step forward and back up our friend's success in every way that was possible.

What evenings they were at Tom Hood's in South Street on Fridays, particularly when Robertson, and Gilbert, and Harry Leigh, and Arthur Sketchley, were in good conversational trim. What delightful music we listened to when Jimmy Molloy or Paul Gray sat down to the piano and recalled their native Irish melodies. Has Jimmy Molloy forgotten that his first published song taken to Ransford's—the never-to-be-forgotten "White Daisy"—was by the introduction of Tom Hood, and that he became a song-writer merely from the applause of his friends at Tom Hood's "Friday nights?" And there were many there as well—kindly Tom Archer, as grave as a churchwarden; Jack

Brough, grinning through his spectacles; little Quin, talking science; M'Connell, telling us stories of the Bar; all literary, or musical, or journalistic men round the table, and very few actors at all; and so we kept it up until the market-carts crept up the hill in Piccadilly, and we all went homewards as the day was breaking. To this day, whenever on Friday nights I see the market-carts creeping along Piccadilly, I am reminded of Tom Hood's delightful evenings, and then it is I think of the dear old friends—not lost, thank God, but gone before.

Dear me! all these old recollections have sprung up from the mention of the first appearance of John Hare yesterday, and young Gilbert Hare to-day. I must be more varied in my further memories; but, honestly, I never know what I am going to write about when I put pen to paper.

I recently read with great interest the "Truth about the *Dead Heart*," told by Mr. John Coleman, and it recalled to my memory many men and scenes long passed away. First of all, I was interested to learn that the long-promised, but never produced (in London) play, *Marlborough*, by that clever but unfortunate dramatist, Watts Phillips, is still in existence; and even at this day it is waiting an opportunity to be produced. It is now the property of Mr. Coleman, but whether the "dear old fellow" who presented the present possessor with the play, refers to George Vining, or Benjamin Webster, or Watts Phillips himself, I am unable clearly to understand. Mr. Coleman says, "A short time previous to his death the dear old fellow generously presented me with the play, and now it remains till time and opportunity shall enable me to produce it." Vining, Webster, and Watts Phillips are all dead, and all enjoyed the personal friendship of Mr. Coleman; but it is not quite clear from whom he obtained the legacy of *Marlborough*, a play that

some years ago was spoken of with bated breath as one of the hidden marvels of the dramatic age.

At one time we heard of nothing but *Marlborough*, and it was alluded to in terms that suggested that Shakespeare was to be eclipsed. "Ah! but you should read *Marlborough*! Such a play! Such a fortune in it! Such a success if it could only be brought out." No one who ever read *Marlborough* hesitated to give an opinion that it would make thousands. Every manager in London at that time was on the eve of producing it. Chatterton swore by it; Webster believed in it; Vining produced it in the country; but the unfortunate London public never saw it, have never seen it to this day. Whenever a manager was in doubt or difficulty, some Albion friend invariably suggested *Marlborough*; but there the play remains, waiting still for "time and opportunity" to produce it. I

should have thought that the time had come, after all these weary years of waiting.

It is strange this faith in dramas that vividly attracted attention in days gone by, or that were read in private, but somehow never saw the light. They are all master-pieces until they are produced. I don't mind owning that I have a pet hobby of this kind. I once saw a very powerful play acted by Dominic Murray at the Princess's, soon after Kean's time, called *Light and Shadow*, by Mr. A. R. Selous. I believe it was originally called *Æsop*, and contained a weird dramatic part which would have suited Robson, and would be worthy the attention of a Beerbohm Tree, or a Willard. It affected me strangely at the time, but I suppose there was something against it, or it would have been unearthed long ago. I observe that managers who rave most loudly about works of genius never produce them.

Who that knew him could have forgotten how "Colonel" Bateman raved about the modern version of *Faust*, written by Herman Merivale, years before it was produced? He told us about it, and described it in detail until we were tired of hearing about it. "A modern Faust, my boy, a modern Mephisto, a modern Marguerite—all in afternoon clothes, and going out to picnics and dances." But somehow or other when the wonderful play was produced, clever and admirably written as it was, it did not come up to expectation. The "make-up" box in the arbour to transform Faust was rather a strong order, and the flash of lightning that killed him in the churchyard was not impressive. *The Cynic* was, of course, admirably written, but it did not succeed; in fact, it was scarcely more popular than Mr. Gilbert's *Gretchen*.

On this very same subject I received a letter from my dear old friend Godfrey Turner, who was apparently so excited over

his discovery that he did not even finish or sign his letter—I know his handwriting well enough for all that—in which he says: “In these days of histrionic Jacobinism, might you not hint that there is a dust-covered drama, called, I think, *The Cabinet-Maker of Lyons*, in which Mr. Edward Faucit Savile, a near relation of Miss Helen Faucit (Lady Martin), played the principal part. He will be remembered by veteran playgoers as the ‘Terriss of his time.’ Nothing would less astonish me than to see *The Cabinet-Maker* cleared of superincumbent cobwebs, and re-habilitated with a success rivalling that of *Paul Kaurar*.” Here unfortunately the letter breaks off, and no more is said. But I present the idea to Mr. William Terriss or his imitators. I had not time to hunt up *The Cabinet-Maker of Lyons*. Let others do it.

I confess to being somewhat interested in the origin of the catch-word, “I believe you, my boy,” by which old Paul Bedford was once so famous at the Adelphi. This

is Mr. John Coleman's version:—"It was generally believed that the well-known phrase, 'I believe you, my boy,' was a gag of Paul's invention; but he himself told me that it was my old friend T. P. Cooke, who suggested it to the author. The renowned T. P., who was a capital hand at spinning a yarn, called in one morning during the rehearsals (of the *Dead Heart*) at the Adelphi. Chatting with Bucky and Paul at the wings, Cooke said that at the naval engagement of the taking of Cape St. Vincent, during the fight a chain-shot had just cleared the figure-head of a messmate. 'Hullo, Joe! that was too near to be pleasant,' said T. P. 'I believe you, my boy,' replied Joe. 'A capital catch-word that,' said Bucky. 'I'll annex it for Jack Gong!'"

Well, that sounds very well, only unfortunately Bucky had annexed it five years before—as I have elsewhere pointed out—in a play called *Poor Jack*, in which Buckstone, Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Keeley (Miss

Goward), Miss Fortescue, Paul Bedford, and T. P. Cooke all appeared. This was in 1840. The part of Flipper, in *Poor Jack*, was taken by a pantomimist named King, and the part of Griffin by Paul Bedford. Says Griffin: "How are you? Don't that warm up your old hull; don't that caulk the leaks in your shivery old timbers." To which Flipper replies: "I believe you, my boy." Now it is quite possible that T. P. Cooke did tell the yarn to Buckstone in 1840—not 1845—and he then may have given the gag to King, the pantomimist. Anyhow, Paul Bedford annexed it in 1845 in the *Green Bushes*.

Says Mr. Coleman of Paul Bedford: "Actors of ten times his ability never achieved a tithe of his popularity. His acting was nothing—his personality everything." With this opinion I thoroughly agree. I often used to meet old Paul in Toole's dressing-room at the Adelphi in the early sixties, and I can honestly say I never found him amusing either on or off

the stage. But he sang an excellent song, to wit, "Jolly Nose," and "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut," in which he admirably described the advancing stages of inebriety. But this opinion was not generally shared, for I can remember when I was quite a child my mother going into fits of laughter as she described Wright and Paul Bedford in the burlesque of *Norma*, in which a bunch of carrots played a conspicuous part. My dear mother, who has an excellent theatrical memory, was a great opera-goer in her younger days, and saw Grisi, Mario, Jenny Lind, Lablaché, and Rubini in their best days, so I suppose the subject appealed to her.

There is nothing like a row or discussion with the critics to ensure the success of a play that is trembling in the balance. Lucky the manager or author who is permitted to answer his critic and create controversy. The *Woman in White* lived for some time on the newspaper discussion started by George Vining, who had failed

as Fosco. Mr. Burnand stirred up the expiring embers of *The Turn of the Tide*; Mr. Labouchere and his lieutenant, John Ryder, created such a row over *The Last Days of Pompeii*, that the people actually went to see it and the music-hall acrobat who danced on the tight-rope over the triclinia; and one of the most violent articles ever written by dear old E. L. Blanchard—and, as a rule, he was the mildest of censors—was in the *Daily Telegraph*, on the subject of *Pink Dominoes*. That article made the fortune of the play. None knew the value of recriminatory correspondence better than Charles Reade, who insisted that *Shilly-Shally* must be a good play, because it was written by Charles Reade and suggested by Anthony Trollope; whereupon he started a tilting match at the critics, and scattered libel writs in every direction.

I very much doubt whether *The Village Priest* received serious harm from the

theological discussion that arose out of it ; and recently the clever Charles Wyndham successfully got up a boom for the Criterion version of *She Stoops to Conquer* by justifying the "farmyard hen," the cackling of George Giddens, the comic Hardcastle, the modern "gags," the David-Garrick feather head-dress of Mrs. Hardcastle, and the schoolgirl Miss Hardcastle, on the authority of Horace Walpole and Dr. Johnson ! Clever manager, Mr. Wyndham ! I take off my hat to you.

But I wonder if the hen continues to cackle, or if any of the first-night "gags" have been eliminated ? For it is the policy of the modern manager to adopt on the second night every hint that the critics have given on the first, to improve the play by the suggested alterations, and then to turn round and revile the critics who have been invited to come and give their opinion !

This reminds me of an old cricket story. A very bad player was always giving an excuse why he was out. First he was "bowled off his pad," next the "sun was in his eyes," next he had a "bad bat," and so on. At last one day when he was out as usual nearly the first ball, "l.b.w.," he was asked again: "Well, old fellow, how was it?" "D——d fool of an umpire!" This is the manager's last excuse of all when others fail. First, it is the author, who does not understand his business; next, the audience, which has been packed by enemies; then some wretched member of the company; then the scene-painter or the limelight man—that faithful functionary of the modern actor-manager; but, last of all, when other excuses fail, the inevitable one—"D——d fool of a critic!"

"If I mistake not, there is a surprise in store for you on Saturday night; and

that young Robson will remind you not a little of his uncle, the great Robson ! ” Such was the agreeable news conveyed to me in a courteous letter by an enthusiastic author, but who at the same time is a very excellent judge of a play. I only hoped that it would turn out to be as my friend believed, for even to be under the shadow of the great Robson would be something. I very much doubt, however, if my friend Mr. James Mortimer ever saw the “ great little ” Robson at all ; but, as it happened, I had an earlier opportunity of studying his remarkable talent than most playgoers of my age. I happened to be born in the now unromantic region of New North Road, Islington, the main highway between Canonbury and the City, a district that in my childhood’s days was not wholly unconnected with the drama and the history of English amusements. I visited the district a few months ago, and found all the familiar streets cut up with tramways, and the private houses turned into shops ; and it would be difficult indeed to persuade the modern Hoxtonian

what a pretty district it was between the forties and the fifties, if not at a still later date.

In those early schoolboy days we could walk over fields nearly all the way from our house to Dalston and Hackney, where several of our intimate friends lived. Tryon's Place, Hackney, with its fine old Queen Anne houses and old-fashioned gardens, seemed to my childish imagination to be in the very heart of the country. Stoke Newington Green and Green Lanes were paradises of blossom, and we children could pick May and bring home primroses when on a not very long walk towards Hornsey Wood. The amusements in our neighbourhood were mainly of a rustic and suburban kind. Of course, we had Sadler's Wells within easy walking distance, and the charm of seeing the celebrated Shakespearean performances during the Phelps and Greenwood management in the old theatre by the New River; but the inhabitants of the New North Road princi-

pally patronised the gardens and *al fresco* dancing. Several of the best-known taverns were provided with gardens and green benches, where the simple citizens smoked their pipes in the evening ; and even to this day you can see the last trace of the country alehouse life in the Marylebone Road, where, at one public-house at least, has been preserved the ale house bench, the swinging sign, and the trough for watering the horses. The road in which I was born, in a house still surrounded with trees that my father planted, was dotted all over with these homely, cosy inns, which were the club-houses of the respectable parishioners. They smoked their churchwardens out-of-doors in the garden during summer-time, and in the winter sat round a cosy fire in the parlour, and discussed politics as well as matters of parochial and local importance. In time these gardens became more festive. We had close by our house the "North Pole Gardens" ; a place not quite so respectable, called the Albert Saloon, in Shaftesbury Street, Hoxton ; and, most important

of all, the Grecian Saloon, attached to the Eagle Tavern, in the City Road. My dear old friend Blanchard and his attached companion, Mr. Jonas Levy, who both knew the neighbourhood well, have often told stories in print about "Bravo, Rouse!" and of the days of old Conquest, the father of our George Conquest of the Surrey. But my allusion to the Grecian was in connection with the "great little" Robson, for I heard him sing the "Country Fair" as a boy in the *al fresco* play-house and smoking-garden, long before he met Johnnie Toole in Dublin, and years before he became the hero and idol of Olympic audiences. All this, remember, took place during the lifetime of the Prince of Wales, though it sounds like ancient history. It must have been about Robson's time at the Grecian that the London street-boys were singing :

" Up and down the City Road,
In and out the 'Eagle,'
That's the way the money goes,
Pop ! goes the Weasel ! "

Let it not, however, be implied from this

that the old Grecian Saloon was in any way a debauched or dissipated place. Quite the contrary. It was the last survival of the old citizen tea-gardens, which became totally extinct with the destruction of the Surrey Gardens, Vauxhall, Cremorne, and Highbury Barn. The amusements were certainly admirably conducted at the Grecian, the birthplace of many an admirable actor, not the least of those known to the present generation being Robson and Tom Mead, and the nursery of "little George Conquest," the dramatist, actor, and gymnast, who is now the father of a grown-up George Conquest, and of innumerable other little Conquests.

I remember old Conquest perfectly well in my earlier days of dramatic criticism, when I used to represent the *Sunday Times*, and often I have visited the theatre of which the old man was the founder, and of which he was very proud. After the entertainment of the evening the old gen-

tleman was in the habit of inviting any of his literary and dramatic friends to join him in a cigar and a glass of particularly fine old brown brandy and water, and his talk was for the most part of the versatile talent of his son George, of whom he was, justifiably, very proud indeed. Young George could speak several languages, he could paint pictures and scenery, he could write plays, and was his old father's factotum and right-hand man. Later on, when the good old father was dead and gone, young George discovered talent also, and in the course of years he had for his literary assistants and right-hand men the very celebrated dramatists, to wit, Henry Pettitt and Paul Merritt. I shrewdly suspect that they learned the best part of their gift of dramatic construction under George Conquest, who was a perfect walking encyclopædia of French melodramatic literature. He must have read countless thousands of French plays, old and new, and he was able to retain what he read. When we were puzzled for the origin of an English melodrama, young George Conquest

was able to tell it even better than Leicester Buckingham or Palgrave Simpson.

Going home from the Grecian, E. L. Blanchard used to entertain me with many an anecdote of old days at the hospitable "Eagle," under Rouse or Conquest. Every year the old gentleman was in the habit of giving a dinner to his friends, and Blanchard was always invited. He noticed that with punctuality and regularity the toast of the "Army and Navy" was always entrusted to the same gentleman, who was particularly proud of the office, and turned off a speech full of fun and patriotism. Blanchard became curious on the subject of this regular attendant, and imagined he was some famous hero who had fought under Wellington at Waterloo or in the Peninsula. At last Blanchard ventured to question his host concerning his military guest. "To what service did he belong? Of what famous military or naval deed was this annual orator the hero?" "Well, no service, so far as I

know," Chuckled old conquest. "Don't you know him? The best fellow in the world! Why, he is the famous maker of military portmanteaus in the Strand!"

My best memories, however, of Robson, the little genius, were in connection with "half-price" at the Olympic. Half-price was a splendid institution for stage-struck lads who enjoyed a very limited supply of pocket-money, and the Olympic pit in those days was the best and most comfortable in London. Round the entire seating part of the pit was a semi-circular platform, where it was possible to move about with ease and to be out of the crowd. Here, for the very modest expense of one shilling you could see, from nine o'clock until eleven, two hours of the very best entertainment in all London, including the greatest genius that the English stage has seen since Edmund Kean. The only strictly serious part that I ever saw Robson play was Desmarets, in *Plot and Passion*, a performance never to be forgotten; but

his burlesque was on the very border-line of tragedy. Such intensity he had, such power of sudden contrast, such quick changes from seriousness to fun, that he electrified one. In an instant he had the whole audience in his grasp, and communicated to them his magnetic personality.

The end was very sad, particularly to an Olympic pittite. We who had seen our favourite as Jim Baggs, or Pawkins, or Jacob Earwig—we who had roared with laughter over the celebrated actor's farce, and cried our eyes red over his old white-haired father in the *Porter's Knot* or as Daddy Hardacre, were pained to be present one night when he was nearly hissed off the stage while playing a comic character in an excellent drama by Watts Phillips, *Camilla's Husband*, which contained a thrilling situation that rings in my ears to this day. It was when Kate Saville, who played the heroine, stepped forward full of outraged indignation, and

said to Henry Neville, "Maurice Warner! I release you from your oath! Fight that man!" But poor Robson was in a sad state. He had lost his memory, and in a scene when, as a travelling tinker, he came on with a donkey, he was almost incoherent. There is no mercy in such cases. Previous good service counts for nothing. No actor who offends is ever "recommended to mercy," and to Fred Robson was awarded the same kind of punishment that was meted out to his predecessor, Edmund Kean. But I wish that some of the modern generation of playgoers could have seen and experienced what his tragic force and intensity were like. He was a very little man, but in his inspired moments he became a giant. He seemed to swell and grow before our eyes. When he lifted himself up his rage was awful; when he wept the whole house sobbed in sympathy.

The only actors possessing anything like Robson's power who succeeded him

were George Belmore and Dominic Murray. The former died all too soon: the latter left us for America. George Belmore was a very fine actor—never, perhaps, quite appreciated as he should have been. Of course, he “created” the old Yorkshire jockey, Nat Gosling, in Boucicault’s *Flying Scud*, and made the fortune of that clever but patchwork play; but one of Belmore’s best performances was in a play by Burnand, called *The Deal Boatman*, in which he played a pathetic old man of the Robson school with great intensity. He came of a fine acting race, that had Leigh Murray for its head, and if Gaston Murray was not as good an actor as the rest of them he was an artistic enthusiast; as was also his brother, Ned Murray, at one time, in the early days of the Arundel Club, one of the most amusing and quaintly droll men I ever met. He had lived in the society of actors, musicians, and artists all his life, and was an admirable mimic. For years Ned Murray was the business manager of the Pyne and Harrison Opera Company, and connected with innumer-

able promenade concerts at Covent Garden, where he was always to be found, in faultless evening attire, ready to regale one with some joke or imitation or story. Ned Murray was passionately fond of singing, and very proud of his bass voice, and he was never so happy as when he was singing masses and offertories at St. George's (Roman Catholic) Cathedral at Southwark, where even to this day his old friends and companions, Meyer Lutz and Aynsley Cook, must miss the cheery face and pleasant ways of their old chum, who told a comic story in the driest and drollest manner imaginable. He was the life and soul of the Arundel Club dinner or supper-table, and on one memorable occasion made the vain old solicitor, Horsley, roll on his portly stomach along the carpet, in imitation of the serpent who was supposed to tempt Eve, who was represented by Ned Murray, in fits of laughter, in a secluded corner. There was no one who could draw Horsley better than Ned Murray. Actually on one occasion this wag persuaded old Horsley to sit for hours

outside the door of the Reunion Club, dressed up as a Roman Ædile, whose duty it was to bow solemnly to each guest who came up the stairs. On the venerable solicitor's bald head had previously been painted some cabalistic signs of doubtful meaning. But Horsley was hypnotised by Murray into believing that this gracious act of condescension was paying honour to the members of the Reunion Club. Poor Murray! He was the next-door neighbour to Blanchard, in the topmost chambers of a gloomy mansion in Southampton Street, Strand, and before he died suffered from gradual softening of the brain. He used to stop one in the street and tell an interminable story, that had no beginning, middle, or ending, with a perfectly bewildering effect. The bright light of his genius had been darkened and his mind became a perfect blank. But it is as a cheery, merry, amusing companion that I remember Leigh Murray's clever brother Ned, and recall delightful hours spent in his company at the old Arundel Club, in Salisbury Street, Strand.

Apropos of my Robson reminiscences, Mr. Bernard Batigan wrote:—"Your reminiscences of that extraordinary actor, Robson, are to me peculiarly interesting. I count it one of the great memories of my life to have seen him frequently. He was strictly and truly a phenomenon. I saw in my youth Macready, Charles Kean, Vandenhoff, G. V. Brooke (whose 'leaving of life' so well became him, and with whom I had some personal acquaintance), and can vividly remember them all, and many other great actors and actresses of the last thirty years; but Robson seemed to awaken in the minds of those who saw him an enthusiasm that no other performer on the stage ever equalled, so far as I am aware. I saw him last at Edinburgh, in the Theatre Royal, Greensides Street (since burnt down, I believe). The house was crammed, at double prices. All the wealth and nobility and intellect of Scotland were said to be there. In one of the great scenes of *Medea* a thrilling incident occurred—thrilling on account of the action of the brilliant audience, as

well as the acting of Robson. The whole house—boxes, stalls, pit, and gallery—literally ‘rose at him,’ and waving of handkerchiefs and hats, bravoos, hurrahs, and universal excitement for some minutes interrupted the progress of the scene. It was a veritable ‘ovation,’ and the only person apparently cool in that immense gathering was the little genius on the stage, who (too true an artist to bow to the applauders) retired to the back of the stage, with his back to the audience. I never witnessed such a scene of enthusiasm before or since, except once, when the late Father Gavazzi was delivering one of his inspiring orations, and then similar wild excitement arose in the auditorium of the lecture hall. The same, or similar excitement was enkindled by Mr. Robson’s acting as Daddy Hardacre, which you doubtless will, I think, acknowledge to have been truly tragic, in more than one scene—quite as essentially tragic, in fact, as the last act of *Hamlet*. But for the very diminutive stature of the splendid actor mentioned, he must have become the

greatest tragedian of the age, had his life been happily spared. Nothing like his acting has, in my opinion, ever been seen in our generation. There was a thrilling, weird awfulness, an overwhelming pathos in it, that made his performance altogether unique."

Who would have dreamed twenty years ago that an English actor would have written these words and actually published them?—"For many years a band of enthusiastic critics did good service by dwelling with fond reiteration on the inferiority of English, as compared with foreign art. At this period of inanition London was visited by the company of the Comédie Française, then in its youth. Since that time we have been continually visited by the best companies from France, Italy, Germany, Holland, and America. It would be strange, indeed, if the strife of competition and emulation had remained without benefit to our own art!" Behold, the unexpected has been accom-

plished, and after weary years of waiting we have got an actor to confess that free trade in art is, after all, far better than protection. The words that I have quoted—and very liberal words they are—occur in an article contributed to a recent number of the *Fortnightly Review* by Mr. Herbert Beerbohm Tree. As the French play season shortly after commenced, under the management of Mr. M. L. Mayer, it was naturally convenient to devote some space to the discussion of this topic of the recognition of foreign art.

In the old days, when I was appointed, as a mere youth, the dramatic critic of the *Sunday Times*—in which post I was succeeded by my old and valued friend, Joseph Knight—the very name of French plays stank in the nostrils of the dramatic profession, and the foreign actor was *anathema maranatha*. In the early sixties neither Mr. Ledger, senior, of the *Era*, nor Mr. Seale, the proprietor of the *Sunday Times*, would have dared to insult

their constituents and advertisers by giving more than the most cursory mention of any French actors who from time to time visited London. The protectionist cry was rampant in the dramatic world. The seedy, ill-informed, and half-educated actor of those days growled about the foreigner as coming over here to "take the bread out of the mouth of the poor actor." By a sort of tacit consent all foreign players were sulkily permitted to act at the St. James's Theatre, and nowhere else. For many years Mr. Mitchell, of Bond Street, with the full assent of the Royal Family and the aristocratic families, had organised seasons of French plays at the fashionable theatre in King Street. Here our fathers and mothers have seen Rachel play *Adrienne Lecouvreur*; here, many still alive, have seen Devrient play *Hamlet*. But these performances were as exclusive as if they had been given at Stafford or Lansdowne House. They interested the "upper crust" alone. Few playgoers of the ordinary class in those days knew French or could follow a French

play. There was no Education Act, so the French players were tolerated in a hole-and-corner way, and their proceedings were reported in the theatrical papers with very much reserve.

On one occasion, as theatrical history tells us, an attempt was made to introduce the thin end of the wedge of free trade, but with very grave results. A company from Paris was brought over to London to play the *Monte Christo* of Alexandre Dumas. The result was a deplorable riot. The protectionists, backed up by some of the best-known actors, critics, and literary men of the day, seriously argued that no French actor should be allowed to perform anywhere in London but at the St. James's Theatre. The Free Trade party were in a decided minority, and *Monte Christo* was played in dumb show. The French players were ignominiously driven back to King Street, and the *Monte Christo* speculation turned out a miserable failure.

And for years after that, at the St. James's Theatre the French companies remained. Here we saw Lafont, still in his prime; here, year after year, Ravel, a comic actor, came to mumble his mannerisms through his nose; here we saw Adèle Page; here we had tragedy, comedy, farce, the highest art and the lowest art; and here, for the first time, Céline Chaumont, then in her prime, warbled "La Première Feuille" to a delighted audience. But sufferance was still the badge of all the French play tribe. The Parisian actors were not actually forbidden, but they were cold-shouldered.

It was not until the end of the Franco-Prussian war and the Communist riots in Paris that a new order of things prevailed. Mainly through the energy of Mr. John Hollingshead, the exiled members of the Comédie Française were invited over to London, and were duly installed at the Opera Comique Theatre. The old prejudice against French actors and French

art was gradually disappearing. Quietly, but deliberately, we had all been pounding away at the question, supported by our liberal employers. I had the help and encouragement of my good friends on the *Daily Telegraph*, ever in the van of progress and liberty. My friend Joe Knight had the cordial support of Mr. Algernon Borthwick, on the *Morning Post*; the Hon. Lewis Wingfield was an active and determined skirmisher; whilst good old Palgrave Simpson, John Clayton, Campbell Clarke, and many another good fellow, gave us enthusiastic and material support. It should never be forgotten that the visit of the Comédie Française was not the commencement of the battle, but the turning-point that gave us the victory.

The first visit of the Comédie Française was a memorable one. Delaunay was still in his prime; Favart was the leading actress at the Française, and the name of Sarah Bernhardt was unknown; Bressant was there to play *Tartuffe*; Dinah Felix

—a relative of Rachel—was in the company, which had also for its mainstay the accomplished Got and the brilliant Coquelin. We were not quite old enough to have seen the days of Regnier, but all his traditions were faithfully preserved by Got and his companions. The *ensemble* was a revelation, and night after night we sat and revelled in our Molière, Dumas and De Musset.

By degrees the party of advance became a little bolder, and we conceived the idea of taking the bull by the horns and giving a grand banquet to the artists of the Théâtre Français before they left the shores of hospitable England. I had the honour of serving on the committee that arranged the celebrated banquet, which took place at the Crystal Palace on one of the loveliest of summer days. On the committee, so far as I can remember, were Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir Frederick Pollock, the Hon. Lewis Wingfield, Algernon Borthwick, Hamilton Aïdé,

Joseph Knight, Alfred Thompson, Herman Merivale, and many more who were staunch defenders of the French players against the grumbling and discontented English actor, who still growled under his breath about "taking the bread out of his mouth."

At last the eventful day arrived, and it was a brilliant success, and one of the most remarkable gatherings of literary and artistic people. Lord Dufferin, Lord Granville, and Alfred Wigan—all perfect French scholars—addressed our guests in their own language, and I remember that the only drawback to this brilliant speechifying was that the banquet was spread in the Crystal Palace Aviary, among the palms and the foreign birds, and it was as much as we could do to hear one another speak, let alone the orators, for the chattering of the cockatoos and the screeching of the parrots and macaws. The enjoyable part of the feast was, however, when cigars and coffee were taken on the terrace-

it with desperate energy. Then came the bound back of Favart as she crossed the stage with a tempestuous rush, uttering the famous words, "Elle est morte! Adieu, Perdican!" The curtain fell on this whirlwind, and all we could see was the look of speechless agony on Delaunay's pale face. The curtain once down, applause was for a moment impossible. The pent-up excitement of all present found its relief in a great gasp. Then came an interval of silence, and those who had stood up in their stalls by an irresistible movement sank exhausted in their seats. Presently this stupor was exchanged for a roar of applause such as I have seldom heard within the walls of a theatre. Surely there must be something uncommon in the supreme art that can produce such effects as these.

From that moment all our difficulties in combating prejudices and urging the value of free trade as a means of improving our own art were comparatively at an

end. The Comédie Française came again to the Gaiety in the days of Sarah Bernhardt and Mounet Sully, and from that day to this no London season has passed without a visit from the most celebrated artists of the time. We have seen and welcomed the best actress in her own line that I have ever seen, Aimée Desclée, who played her last engagement—before her lamented death—at the old Princess's Theatre. No play-actor or actress of the first importance has ever been driven from the stage of hospitable London. We have seen the Dutch players from Rotterdam and Amsterdam, headed by Biersmanns and Faasen, who delighted us so in *Annie Mie*; we were enthusiastic over the Duke's company of German players from Saxe Meiningen, headed by the celebrated Barnay; we listened with delight to our English Shakespeare as interpreted by the incomparable Salvini and by Rossi; and there is no American actor of reputation who has not appeared and been cordially received, from the days of Joe Jefferson (Oh! why does he not come back to us?)

to the days of Ada Rehan, who has recently again delighted us with her presence at the Lyceum. Surely, then, Mr. Beer-bohm Tree is right when he declares with candour and liberality that the strife of competition and emulation has materially benefited English dramatic art. What harm have these Favarts, and Delaunays, and Desclées, and Bernhardts, and Coquelins, and Salvinis, and Jeffersons, and Rehans done to English art? Has not their example materially improved it? What bread has been taken out of the poor actor's mouth? Has not a considerable amount of bread been put into it? When were actors and actresses so well paid as now? When were they so recognised? When did the discussion of their art occupy so much space in the daily newspapers? When before, in the whole history of the stage, did two of the leading magazines devote special articles to the actor and the stage? In this present month three important magazine articles are signed by actors, and two by people intimately connected with the

management of London theatres. Is not all this the direct result of the free trade for which we fought against such fearful odds twenty years ago and more? I am sure it is.

NOW that we are all enjoying to the full the pleasure of another delightful visit from the American comedians who own allegiance to Mr. Augustin Daly; now that dinner-table conversation turns instantly on the charm and genius—there is no other word for it—of Miss Ada Rehan; now that the well-dressed man is envying the cut of the frock-coats worn by Mr. John Drew, and his fall in the back emphasised by a pair of broad, stalwart shoulders; now that we try to find adequate comparisons for merry little Mr. James Lewis and aristocratic-looking Mrs. Gilbert, it may be time to say a word about the progress of American art, and the rare spectacle of London possessing an American company infinitely superior in detail and *ensemble* to the French companies recently acting in London. Of

this there can be no "possible, probable doubt—no possible doubt whatever." How poor old Palgrave Simpson would have shouted and shrugged his shoulders some twenty odd years ago if he had been told that any one present would live to see the day when a company of comedians from America would rise superior to that of the Gymnase Theatre in Paris! Fancy if any one had dared to assert, in the days of Rose Chèri and Lafont and Aimée Desclée, that New York would ever send a company over as good, if not better than Paris could produce! On the boulevards, even to-day, such a proposition would be treated with scorn. When Mr. Daly took his company over to Paris this year, they were, by the majority of the Parisian critics, cold-shouldered, and regarded as barbarians who knew nothing whatsoever of acting. But if this be the case in the future, Paris will prove herself in the wrong, and I, for one, shall have no more faith in the opinions of a Sarcey or a Wolff.

Let the truth be told. There are the companies side by side; any one can see them and judge for themselves. Take Pasca and Noblet and Desclauzas, and all the pretty and well-dressed French-women who occupy the attention of the vulgar sketcher, "Mars," and what sane man would pretend to say that they were better artists all round, or even individually, than Ada Rehan and John Drew, than James Lewis and Mrs. Gilbert, to say nothing of the new-comers, Frederic Bond and Kitty Cheatham? I am not talking wildly or extravagantly. When I first studied the French stage and appreciated the vast superiority of French art over English Art, I did not hesitate to say how infinitely superior French art was to ours. My candour lost me a good many engagements which I was at that time very anxious to keep; my honesty, at any rate, was proved by the loss of bread and cheese. Those were the days when Mr. Frederic Chatterton, manager of Drury Lane Theatre, had the insolence and assurance to go down to the *Weekly*

Dispatch office and demand my instant dismissal, on the penalty of withdrawing his twopenny-halfpenny advertisement, unless I consented to be the slave of Drury Lane and the Chatterton clique and write in accordance with his ideas and not my own. I made a stand then against this managerial insolence, as I would make a stand against it now, if managers attempted to ride roughshod over those who are paid to give their honest opinions, or try by trickery or subterfuge or underhand dealing to stifle criticism that is independent. The *Weekly Dispatch* was a liberal paper, and was not to be browbeaten by one or a dozen Chattertons. The drama was in a rotten state at that time, and some of us said so pretty plainly. When Chatterton, or one of his myrmidons, having already refused me admittance to the playhouses then under his power, told the editor of the paper on which I was a salaried servant that his advertisement would disappear unless I buttered up his frowsy playhouses and his fustian art, he was politely

shown the door by those lusty champions, Mr. George R. Emerson, my excellent editor, and by both Mr. Stiff and Mr. John Baker, the proprietors, who paid me my 30s. a week ! It was a good fight while it lasted, and coercion failed ignominiously.

At this important juncture we found a loyal and unexpected ally where we least expected one. It was in the days of the decadence of the French Empire that I was asked to call upon a gentleman who had just arrived from Paris. His address, if I mistake not, was an hotel in Craven Street, Strand, and his name was Mr. James Mortimer. I was young and comparatively inexperienced at the time, but my friend Mr. Mortimer will, I think, bear me out when I say that I was one of the first that he consulted before starting the *London Figaro*—a paper destined to make such a revolution in theatrical affairs, and a paper which I am confident did an enormous amount of good in establishing liberality of theatrical thought, and in

pulling the tottering walls about the ears of the Chattertons, and Kinlochs, and Ansons, and George Vinings, who feared "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Mr. Mortimer was passionately fond of the stage. He knew America as well as he knew France, and a more independent and right-minded honourable man I have never met. From the very outset he gave me a free hand. He was not a dictator, but an editor in the best sense of the word. Had he been less independent he might have made a fortune instead of losing one. He never truckled to advertiser or manager. His motto was fair play. He fought for the public interest, and many is the cheque that Mr. Mortimer has had to pay for storming the citadel of vulgarity, and for letting in light where all was darkness and despair. I wrote the article signed "Almaviva" for the first number of the *London Figaro* ever published, and for many years after; but Mr. James Mortimer was proud of his discoveries, and his loyal encouragement of ambi-

tious youth. He discovered my friend Mr. Aglen Dowty (O. P. Q. Philander Smiff), whose first articles, detailing the adventures of a charming pair of married lovers, were the talk of London at the time. He discovered another firm friend, Mr. Ernest Bendall, one of the very best, most eloquent, and fairly judicial critics on the London press. And would you be surprised to hear that it was Mr. Mortimer who discovered one of the ablest critics of our time, Mr. William Archer, whose first dramatic criticisms were written in the *London Figaro* under Mr. Mortimer's editorship?

I shall never forget the happy old days of the *London Figaro*. I used to write my "copy" at a miserable little office up a court in the Strand, close by the "Edinburgh Castle," opposite Somerset House; and there I found patient old John Plummer—now a shining light in Australia—sub-editing with diligence, and an erratic genius, one John Baker Hopkins,

turning off political and social leaders with a rapidity that made me tremble for my own miserable inefficiency. The whole time that I wrote for Mr. Mortimer, we never had one word of difference. He encouraged my independence, and he never murmured when my enthusiasm compelled this excellent proprietor and editor to pay for my candour. The *London Figaro* was the first of the independent theatrical papers of my time. No scurrility or personality ever defiled its pages, and I honestly believe that this little journal helped the artistic revival of twenty odd years ago, destroyed theatrical protection, advanced dramatic free trade, and laid the foundation-stone of what we see to-day—a company of English-speaking comedians that has fairly beaten France at its own game.

Like all clever men the old "Colonel" Bateman had his idiosyncrasies. Two of them were very remarkable. One was that Mrs. Bateman, his excellent wife, had

written one of the best plays of the age, called *Geraldine*; and the next was that he, "Colonel" Bateman, was an undeveloped genius in acting. One rash day the old man was persuaded to put his theories to the test. I don't remember much about *Geraldine*, but I have a distinct remembrance of old Bateman, attired in a long white robe, with a grey beard, sitting on a rock with a harp in his hand, like a primæval Welsh bard or King David. *Geraldine* was a miserable failure, and this was the first and last appearance of old Bateman as an actor. But to the day of his death he believed in *Geraldine*, and it would not have been surprising if he had insisted on putting it up at the Lyceum when *Fanchette* failed, instead of *The Bells*, which rang out the success of Henry Irving. I wonder how long it would have delayed the inevitable triumph?

But in those days the American actors and actresses came as "stars," not in

companies. Alas! we have never seen Clara Morris. This is one of the regrets of my artistic life. I have seen, I think, all the best actors and actresses of my time except Clara Morris. And they were delightful stars and shone brilliantly. *Facile princeps*, of course, was Joseph Jefferson, one of the best English-speaking actors I have ever seen; and then came John E. Owens, and Emmett, and John McCullough, and Billy Florence, and Fanny Davenport, and Janauschek, and Edwin Booth, and John S. Clarke, and who shall say how many more, until we were favoured with the best complete company America has ever sent us, the most artistic combination America has probably ever seen, to say nothing of one whom I do not hesitate to call one of the best—if not the best—English-speaking actresses of her time, the delightful and incomparable Ada Rehan.

The news of the sad death of Miss Fanny Josephs, gentlest of women, and most refined of actresses, takes me back

to the winter of the year 1859. I had just left Marlborough ; and, in order not to suffer from the deplorable sin of idleness whilst waiting for some Government employment, it was decreed by the authorities at home that I should attend the evening classes at King's College, in the Strand. Now, as everyone knows, the educational college in the Strand—where I duly attended innumerable lectures on ancient and modern history, French, book-keeping, “account states,” and such like mental pabulum necessary to fit me for my duties as a Government clerk—happens to be the next-door neighbour to the Strand Theatre. It was a good long step from the New North Road, Hoxton, to King's College in the Strand, and I was considerably provided with sufficient pocket-money to enable me to enjoy the privilege of a 'bus—one way, at any rate. But I had ideas of my own, and preferred to “step it” there and back to the wilds of Islington, in order on special nights to enjoy the privilege of a seat in the pit of the Strand Theatre, in place of a King's

College evening lecture. Money, I know, was very scarce in those days, and I plead guilty to selling one or two very dry and uninteresting volumes—my own—at a bookseller's shop in the City Road, in order to enable me to have my one night's playgoing in the course of the dreary week. It was then across the footlights that I first made the acquaintance of many who were afterwards my friends.

The Strand burlesque of those days that shines brightest in the memory is the *Esmeralda* of Henry J. Byron. Even now I can see James Rogers—dismal Jimmy—with his pale face still paler under the effect of the wonderful make-up for Claude Frollo; and Johnnie Clarke, hideously dwarfed, as Quasimodo; and Fanny Josephs, in a wonderful black and crimson dress, with a tambourine and pet goat, as *Esmeralda*, the dancing-girl; and, best of all to me in those boyish days, an enchanting little creature in a fluffy white coat, beating a drum, supposed to be Pierre Gringoire, the poet, but who was,

in fact, that most delightful of all actresses, Miss Marie Wilton. They were a wonderful contrast — Fanny Josephs and Marie Wilton. The one, dark, elegant, gipsy-like. The other, a little fair, fluffy ball of fun, beautifully made, beautifully dressed, with a voice that thrills me now as I hear it, with a piquancy that is simply indescribable, and a method of dancing that, I must candidly own, I have never seen since. We have seen dancing as good, perhaps better, but the style of Marie Wilton is one that I still think can never be repeated, so far as I am concerned. All the University boys at Oxford and Cambridge were in love with Marie Wilton. They hung up her pictures in their rooms as they had before hung up the pictures of Carlotta Leclercq, as Perdita, in the Charles Kean version of *A Winter's Tale*; and I know this for certain, that when the Strand play was over, the little Surrey Street was lined with infatuated youths, who stood there gaping and gazing as a humble four-wheeler drove away with

our idolised Pierre Gringoire, no more a poet in pearl-grey tights, but a humble and hard-working member of the dramatic profession, the cheery little bread-winner for a large and affectionate family. It seemed to me a very excellent entertainment for the money—2s., I think—and far better than the stage-struck youth can obtain nowadays. There was, for a first piece, some clever and interesting comedietta, generally in two acts, in which Parselle and William Belford and Miss Swanborough appeared; then came the burlesque, with the celebrated company I have mentioned, with the addition of handsome Kate Carson, and many more; and finally an excellent farce, such as *Short and Sweet*, with Rogers and Clarke in the principal characters. Actors and actresses of the first consequence did not mind playing the people in or out in those days.

But although Miss Marie Wilton, afterwards Mrs. Bancroft, was the Nellie Farren of those ideal days of burlesque,

she always had a soul above it, and was never so happy as when she had a part as well in the opening comedietta. I was present on one memorable occasion, when our idolised Marie Wilton played the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in an enchanting fashion. She was the Juliet, and Ada Swanborough was the Romeo, and everyone present seemed delighted with the experiment, which created a great stir at the time, much as if the Nellie Farren of to-day were suddenly to announce her intention of seriously appearing in a Shakespearian play—say as Ophelia, for instance, or Desdemona.

I am reminded by a very old friend, who worked with me in the early days of the *London Figaro*, that I have accidentally omitted the names of others who have moved on with success from Mr. Mortimer's paper. They are Mr. Betts, who is now the musical critic for several influential papers, notably the *Daily News*,

Truth, and the *Graphic*; and Mr. Milliken, the well-known poet in *Punch*, who, I believe, is the author of the celebrated cockney letters signed "'Arry." The letter I allude to concludes with this generous and genuine sentiment, "Poor Mortimer! he did better for us than for himself."

And all this leads me to a new train of thought. What, after all, is the true secret of success in journalism? I firmly believe that patient industry is far more valuable to the young writer than any amount of genius. Your genius, who can never do anything unless he is "inspired," who has his moods and his fancies, who does not feel inclined to write when he is called upon, is of very little value to the newspaper editor. Far better the patient, toiling man, than the spasmodically brilliant man. The latter talks, the former does. The genius is found at the club, criticising and cavilling; the cart-horse is between the shafts, doing

his allotted task of work. I have found in my career that a successful journalist makes some of his fellow-workers very angry. His success is attributed to "luck," favouritism, unfair play, and what not. Don't believe it. The success is due to two things—punctuality, and a desire to do the best work possible on every possible occasion. It is often forgotten what hours of toil, what refusals of pleasure, what weariness of mind and what agonies of body are endured before any journalist can, by any possibility, climb to the top branches of the tree. It is not done in a minute, I can assure you.

For instance, going to the play looks a very delightful form of amusement. People often envy me the possession of a stall on a first night, and say I am a lucky individual. But they forget that I am desperately and earnestly at work from the time the curtain rises at eight, until close upon two o'clock in the morning,

and that, as the saying is, "it takes it out of you the next day," when the reaction comes, about four o'clock in the afternoon, and one thanks God for the possession of a quiet room and a large sofa. They all tell me that my life at Ascot meetings, and cricket matches, and Henley regattas, must be the most delightful in the world; but they forget that when they come home fagged after a day's pleasuring, the journalist has to be as bright and unweary as possible, and in the best of spirits, in order to try one more new description of a scene that has been described to death. "Ah! yes, but it comes so easy to you!" is the common form of consolation, even from those with whom one is most intimate. "Work is a pleasure to you." Is it? Work is a duty, but, strange as it may sound, I would far rather go to the club after the play, and chat with my friends over a cigar, and discuss what we had all seen, than rush off to write about it; and extraordinary as it may sound, a rest and a comfortable dinner after Ascot, or Henley,

or Doncaster, is preferable to a couple of hours at the desk at the end of a railway journey, with the prospect of no dinner at all.

When I was a clerk in the War Office, and was just beginning dramatic work, it often happened that I wanted a deputy, who could easily have earned a small addition to his income. But you would not believe how difficult it was to find any one who would give up the slightest pleasure for the sake of work. "Oh! I have to go to this dance, or that dinner; or I have promised so-and-so to do this, that, or the other. Another time I should like to help you immensely, but to-night it is really impossible." The only one of my friends who ever seriously responded to my call was Ernest Bendall, who was ever ready to assist, ever ready to work, punctual to the minute—and you all know and see the result. His remarkable power of analysis, his delightful style, his accurate judgment, might all have been buried had

he not determined to "do his best," and postponed all other pleasures for the sake of the practice that in the end makes perfect.

A slight illustration will show more clearly what I mean. Some day, perhaps, I shall have an opportunity of telling the story of my journalistic life from the very beginning, when I was impertinent enough, at the age of nineteen, to apply for the post of dramatic critic to the *Sunday Times*, which was just vacated by my old friend J. T. Foard, a barrister on the northern circuit, who at that time lived at the Arundel Club. It will be time for all that by-and-bye. I only want to show that the journalist who wants to get on must never miss an opportunity or throw away a chance. I was, at the time I mention, the dramatic critic of the *Weekly Dispatch*, and the occasion to which I refer, was one night on which some very important play was produced. It was on a Saturday; I had been down to the *Dispatch* office and

written my notice of the new play, and had returned to the Arundel Club to enjoy the rest and smoke and chat that pleasantly follow work, when who should come in, far more excited than was his wont, but Edward Dicey, who was the editor of the *Observer*, then printed and published close to the Strand Theatre, at the old *Bell's Life* office, where I had previously spent many and many an interesting hour with Frank Dowling, who introduced me to the celebrated prize-fighters of the day. "Ah! you are exactly the fellow I wanted to see," said Dicey, as he came up to my corner in the club-room. "I want you to help me." "What is the matter?" I asked. "Well, the fact of the matter is, that my dramatic critic has not put in an appearance at the office. It is now one o'clock in the morning. We have not got one syllable about the new play to-night; and I ask you if you will come with me and write only a few lines, as it will never do for the *Observer* to come out and say nothing about it. I know you must be tired, but

will you help me?" The man who hesitates is lost, equally with the woman. Had I hesitated I should have lost my opportunity. Before three o'clock—for the *Observer* went late to press—I had written over a column of descriptive criticism for the *Observer*, in addition to my own work on the *Weekly Dispatch*. On Monday morning I was sent for by Edward Dicey, and he expressed his thanks in a very practical manner. He offered me then and there the post of dramatic critic to the *Observer*, which was then, as now, one of the plums of the profession. A very few years later, when I had stuck to the *Observer* work pretty hard, and tried to make a feature of the Saturday night notices—the best practice for one in the world—I was sent for again. This time the summons came from my devoted friend and constant counsellor, Mr. J. M. Levy, who asked me if I would help E. L. Blanchard with the dramatic work on the *Daily Telegraph*. For a long time I worked both coaches, writing a long notice of a play for the *Observer* for

Sunday, and for the *Daily Telegraph* for Monday morning. But at last the *Daily Telegraph* claimed all my services, and my successor on the *Observer* was naturally the man who had so loyally assisted me many a time and oft—Ernest Bendall; and there we have both remained since the year 1872—suspiciously like eighteen years, is it not?

To travel farther back, I think I owe my first start in journalistic life to Freemasonry. I am not a Mason, but it was a Mason who did me a very good turn, and obtained for me the post of dramatic critic to the *Sunday Times*. As I was perfectly unknown and untried, I sent in a series of testimonials to the then proprietor of the *Sunday Times*, Mr. E. W. Seale, a banker in Leicester Square. Mr. Seale was an ardent Freemason, and among my testimonials was one from a clergyman, Mr. Owen, who put a lot of cabalistic signs in the corner of his envelope. I don't know what they meant, but

Mr. Seale evidently did. A critic recommended by a parson who was a Mason was quite enough for the banker. He gave me the appointment (2l. 2s. a-week) without a murmur!

Apropos of actor-managers, it was an ingenious move to propose a crafty amendment to the original question on the subject of the general artistic value of actor-managers. At the outset the question put by Mr. Oswald Crawford was, "Whether the drama, on the whole, gains or suffers from having an actor as head of our leading London theatres?" The question has been freely discussed in several influential magazines and reviews, but it is needless to state that the subject has by no manner of means been exhausted. Whereupon I found recently that some one had in another form propounded exactly the same question, and had actually drawn all the principal managers of London into his net or ambush. He asked whether it was good

or bad for the stage to write a play independently, or to "write round" a leading actor and his company? Now, what is the material difference between the two questions? Place an actor or actress at the head of a theatre, and what chance has an author of a hearing for any play that does not immediately concern that actor or actress? It is all very well for my friend Mr. Henry Arthur Jones to say that he has virtually abandoned the plan of writing for any particular actor or any particular company; but I presume from that, he is lucky enough and independent enough to indulge in whimsical fancies, and to have a play or so a year on his hands. We are told that *Judah* was not written for anybody; but is Mr. Henry Arthur Jones sure that there was not a little "mental reserve" even in *Judah*? Come now, Mr. Jones, examine your conscience. Supposing Mr. Willard had not happened to be available, what would have been the off-chance that Mr. Beerbohm Tree would have scorned to play the Rev. Judah Llewellyn? Mr.

Tree loves parsons and priests. He has ranged from the lemon-coloured curate in the *Private Secretary* to the white-haired Abbé Dubois. He can hear confessions as a milk-and-water Anglican, and break the seal of them as a Roman priest. He coquettes alternately with the mild Puseyite and the Scarlet Lady. Was it likely that an actor so learned in the study of parson types would have refused a Welsh Presbyterian minister, with the earnestness of a Calvin, and who is made "picturesque" in a High-Church waistcoat and a round Roman collar, which any Presbyterian minister would have hated as the "devil hates holy water"? It is so necessary to be "picturesque" in these days; not so necessary to be accurate. When managers hang their pictures outside their shops as if they were signboards, or as the late lamented Mr. Richardson was accustomed to do at his booth in Bartholomew Fair, it is so necessary to be "picturesque." What does it matter whether Presbyterian ministers wear untidy white cravats or neat Roman collars,

whether their coats are cut by a rough country tailor or Mr. Foster, of Oxford and Waterloo Place?—it is essential from the photographic point of view that the parson, of whatever denomination, should be “picturesque.” Consider, good Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, and answer me candidly. Do you mean to say that when you sat down to your desk and evolved out of your brilliant brain that famous figure of Judah Llewellyn, of which George Eliot herself might have been proud, you did not aim at Mr. Willard and dream of Mr. Beerbohm Tree?

And, only think of it, there was yet another “off-chance.” Was not your good old friend and patron, Mr. Wilson Barrett, coming home from America? Did not he want a play very badly? Was he not also enamoured of parsons? Was he not, dear Mr. Jones, the hero of one of your earliest little pieces—*A Clerical Error*? and is it not the fact that because Mr. Wilson Barrett took you by

the hand at the outset of your career that you found yourself sailing to success and sighting the *insulas fortunatas* on board the good ship *Silver King*? If there happened to be a parson of any kind knocking about, be sure good Mr. Wilson Barrett would not be forgotten; and what a chance Judah Llewellyn might have been for the opening of the new theatre soon after in Wych Street, Strand! True, Mr. Wilson Barrett inclines to port-wine parsons of the old school—red-faced, cheery old gentlemen of the Tory and Protectionist class, who preach old sermons, and pin their faith to the Rubric and the Thirty-nine Articles! But, at a pinch, good Mr. Jones, you might have modelled your scene from clerical life to suit your old friend Mr. Wilson Barrett. The semi-Semitic dissenter might have lived in Yorkshire as well as in Wales. The conventicle might have been situated at Headingley or at Ilkley as well as near Llangollen; and, upon my honour, now I come to think of it, Miss Winifred Emery—as was sub-

sequently proved — would have looked delightful, and thin, and wavy, and earnest, with her great speaking eyes, as Vashti Dethic, the starving girl ! When an author has goods to sell he keeps his eye on the market. There is more than one linendraper in the same street, and, though we may not manufacture for one particular shop, it does not do to be out of the fashion, does it ?

Some have, however, said that there is no rule without an exception—which is perfectly true. Others insist that the exception proves the rule, which is not quite an accurate way of putting it. The soundness of the rule is proved by the quality of the exception. My own idea of the rule is, so far as my experience goes, that it is the tendency of any manager who is an actor, or a manageress who is an actress, to look particularly well after No. 1, or after any No. 2 who may be particularly near or dear to them. This is human nature. Who can blame them ?

They have invested money, or obtained money to invest, for their own personal pleasure and aggrandisement, and they naturally look after themselves or their beloved ones in the first instance. I don't find many capitalists burning with anxiety to share their gains with their workmen, however valuable to them. No proprietor who has ever employed me has thrown at my feet even one ten-thousandth part of the gains that have accrued to him in the course of one year's, or any number of years' service. I do not grumble; I am content. If I had ever been master instead of servant, I dare say I should have done the same, and my conscience would have provided me with some specious excuse for putting my gains into my own bank, instead of into the bank of my estimable servant. Socialism has not spread so far as to affect me personally. I am dictated to by no trades-union that refuses to allow me to work night or morning, Sundays or week-days, high-days, holidays, or bonfire nights; and the working man, who

kicks up such a tremendous fuss about his "hours of labour," would open his eyes very wide if he knew how many hours a journalist works. For myself, I envy the "horny-handed man of toil" when I see him coming home with his bag of tools on his back at 6 o'clock in the evening. I have been at it since 10, and shall continue at it until 2 a.m. Why, the "working man" would create a revolution if he had to work as we have to do in these days of keen competition and rivalry. The rule, then, is, as I understand it, that the "actor-manager" looks after No. 1 in the first instance. Art may be his aim, but selfishness is his study.

Next to Mr. John Hare, certainly the most unselfish manager with whom I have ever had dealings—in the days when I was foolish enough to try to write plays—were the Bancrofts, and I will explain why very shortly. I have written to order for many managers. The first play

that I ever adapted—*Off the Line*—was not written to any order, but it was accepted by the first actor to whom it was ever read—Mr. Toole. That was a queer experience which is worth recording. Mr. Toole was not an actor-manager in those days, but a member of the Adelphi company. He took a fancy to the little play, however, and bought it from me just as it stood, and it became his property. Wishing to play *Off the Line* on one of his provincial tours, Mr. Toole proposed to Mr. Benjamin Webster to play the piece, as it would suit his first low comedian and Mrs. Alfred Mellon admirably. Being an innocent and guileless creature in those days, I had placed on my manuscript the name of the original play from which it was adapted. What followed? *Off the Line* was rehearsed, but never produced at the Adelphi, and for a very good reason—it belonged to Mr. Toole; so the excellent Adelphi manager got another version of the same play adapted by his own son, and it was acted at the Adelphi before Mr. Toole had

the chance of producing *Off the Line* elsewhere. To order I adapted, with the assistance of Mr. Arthur Mathison, *The Great Divorce Case*, for Mr. Charles Wyndham. To order I adapted several plays for Mr. Horace Wigan, when he was the manager of the Holborn Theatre. To order, with the help of Mr. Charles B. Stephenson, I adapted *Peril and Diplomacy*, for the Bancrofts; and, to order, *The Vicarage*, for the same managers. To order I wrote *The Cape Mail*, for Mr. Hare and Mrs. Kendal; and to order I have refused to adapt some hundreds of plays which I did not care for, and which I did not consider suitable for the theatre proposing them. I suppose, on an average, I refuse to adapt some dozens of plays a year, and some hundreds of offers at collaboration. I have given it all up. I want to review plays, not to write them. I have very good reasons for doing so, but I cannot explain them now. That will come by-and-by, with "documentary evidence."

The story of the Bancroft management is very interesting on this point. Mrs. Bancroft, then Miss Marie Wilton, started with the idea that her then partner, Mr. Henry J. Byron, would always write for the company. He was to be the dramatic tailor, and to have the first call. It was anticipated that Byron's comedies and burlesques would keep the ball rolling. But poor Byron was ambitious. He soon had too many irons in the fire. Liverpool crushed him, and he left his clever little partner somewhat severely in the lurch. *Vide the Reminiscences*, where the story is clearly told. Up comes Tom Robertson. Now, *Society* was clearly not written for the Bancrofts, or for any single member of their company. It was bought ready-made, and the company fitted themselves into the common garment as they best could. Who would ever have dreamed of Bancroft as an impassioned lover, or Mrs. Bancroft as a bread-and-butter *ingénue*. By a miracle of good luck *Society* succeeded. There was something fresh, new, and unconventional about it.

But after that one first moment of success Robertson wrote round his company. Whenever he launched out and wrote for other companies he failed—*e.g.*, *Shadow Tree Shaft*, the *Nightingale*, the *Rapid Thaw*, *For Love*, &c., &c. He became the dramatic tailor for the little Prince of Wales's Theatre. He measured the figures, and he fitted them all to a nicety. Mr. Bancroft was no more the impassioned lover, Sidney Daryl; he became Captain Hawtree! Clever dramatic tailor, Tom Robertson! Mrs. Bancroft was no more Maud Hetherington; she became Polly Eccles and Naomi Tighe. Excellent judge of a good fit, Tom Robertson! Why, in *Caste* there is a scene—the ballet scene improvised to introduce George d'Alroy to the widow—which I have seen Mrs. Bancroft do in private, years before *Caste* was written. Mrs. Bancroft was Tom Robertson's inspiration. He dearly loved "genius," and here he had it ready-made to his hands. He was a wonderful judge of character and keen observer of personal

idiosyncrasy. How else would he have created Hawtree for Bancroft? How else would he have chosen Fred Younge, his old schoolfellow and companion, for George d'Alroy?—the very best of all the d'Alroys that have ever attempted the part. Thackeray's Dobbin must have been the inspiring germ of d'Alroy, but Fred Younge may often in real life have suggested Dobbin to Robertson. There was not a character in *Caste* that was not evolved from the pages of Thackeray and the study of the manner and character of the artists who had elected to serve under the Bancroft banner. What a keen observer was Tom Robertson! He saw Hare clearly and distinctly as Lord Ptar-migan and Beau Farintosh; but he saw him also, sharp, decisive, cockney to the backbone, as Sam Gerridge, the gasfitter. See how Sam Gerridge is played now, compared to Robertson's creation, echoed so masterfully by John Hare! It is as different from the original as chalk is from cheese. Actor after actor tries George d'Alroy, but no one has under-

stood it but Younge, fortified by the electric sympathy of the author. I dare say Robertson could have made a dozen of our modern actors play both parts. But, unfortunately, he cannot rise from his grave to do so. He would not only have cut the cloth, but fitted it on; that was the great point. To hear Robertson read a story or a play was to understand it in every detail. The actor must have been an idiot not to grasp his notion, and would not deserve the name of an actor.

I shall never forget Robertson's description of the "Wreck of the 'Birkenhead,'" which he always wanted to make into a grand play. It made one thrill to listen to him. He had the genius of the dramatist; he was alive with pathos and situation; but he could not do impossibilities, and make houses without material. The Holborn Theatre and the company there were not suited to tackle the *Wreck of the Birkenhead*. In these days, with Augustus Harris by his side, they would

have made a drama out of this stirring English story that would have awakened the echoes of the National Theatre! Why does not Mr. Harris revise the text of Robertson's old play and give us that magnificent scene that makes one weep to recall it? Think of it! The women and children carefully taken off the doomed ship; the boats going away in the distance containing the hearts of the brave fellows on board; and then the English regiment drawn up on deck with the officers at the head of their companies. The word of command. The salute. The English cheer dying away on the lonely sea, and then the sinking of the ship and awful silence! Mr. Harris must give us the *Wreck of the Birkenhead* some day. Meanwhile I had much to say about *Diplomacy*, and how it came to be made, and the omission shall be supplied in good time.

Robertson had, no doubt, a power of description in which he distanced most

of his contemporaries. Oxenford, George Rose, Charles Coleman, J. C. M. Bellew, and countless others, were all able conversationalists, but they were distanced by Robertson in the club-room and at the dinner table. He could read a play as well as he could write one. I have seen a room full of clever men interested with his conversation. I have been present at literary gatherings when he electrified us with a reading of one of his short stories, and I have seen a company in tears when he read to the assembled actors and actresses one of his plays. It must have been this gift that inspired the artists at the little Prince of Wales' Theatre. But the description of the play he wanted to write on the subject of the "Wreck of the 'Birkenhead'" I shall never forget.

In connection with what I have written about the "Wreck of the 'Birkenhead,'" and Tom Robertson's enthusiasm regarding the dramatic character of this memorable and heroic scene, I soon after

received a very interesting letter from my friend John Hollingshead. The theory is that there was no survivor of the wreck of the "Birkenhead"—yet how could that be, for some one must have come out safe from that watery grave to tell us how the men were drawn up on deck, fired a salute, and went down on the doomed ship with an English cheer?

The sole survivor of the "Birkenhead" is still living, one Captain Ralph Bond Shelton, and it is strange indeed that such an English hero is not better known. The old Emperor of Germany knew who he was well enough, when about the year 1852 he ordered a parade of 100,000 soldiers at Berlin, and caused the account of the heroic deed to be read to the assembled soldiers. There were two officers who first saved the women and children, and then drew the men up on deck and went down with them firing a salute. Captain Shelton was picked up after having been two days in the water, but all the gallant English soldiers were drowned.

And now about *Diplomacy*, of which some account may be interesting. "Would you be surprised to hear," as an eminent counsel used to observe in the Tichborne case, that the English version of Sardou's celebrated play was planned, so far as the construction is concerned, by a select committee of three, in a railway carriage, between Paris and Boulogne? Bancroft, Charley Stephenson, and myself, had been over to Paris to see *Dora* at the Vaudeville, and struck as we all were with the excellence of the play generally, the marvel of the scene for the three men, the splendid dramatic character of the scenes between the husband and the wife, and the brother and Zicka, we all saw that the play required radical alteration of motive for the English stage. The second act of the original play, *Dora*, with its French politics and Parisian Parliamentary *locale*, would have been unintelligible to an English audience. One thing had to be done, that was quite certain—namely, to curtail the play, to find a new motive, and to boil the first and second acts down into one.

Time and opportunity served us. England was just at that time in the thick of the Eastern question. No one knew whether we should or should not help the Turk against the Russian. Prejudices were divided, and Eastern politics were discussed in every newspaper. An official despatch of importance had to be stolen, and an interest given it that would appeal to English sentiment generally, and particularly to English soldiers. Although it is so long ago, I think that I can apportion equally the credit—if, indeed, it is a credit—of the various alterations that turned Sardou's play into a brilliant success instead of a failure, as it must have been had it been translated and its motive matter unchanged, as the author pretended to desire. First of all, Bancroft cracked the first difficult nut by suggesting that the two leading male characters in the play should be brothers. He saw at the outset the value of the brothers Beauclerc. It was an invaluable suggestion. Charley Stephenson, who had been in a Government office for years—and so had

I, for the matter of that—and as a Private Secretary knew all the inner workings of the Foreign Office and diplomacy generally, was bent upon forcing an official tone into the play. Bancroft was all for soldiers, Stephenson was all for Government office. It must be a combination of War Office and Foreign Office. At last it suddenly struck me in a mysterious way: the Eastern question, of course! I was a fierce Jingo at the time—and I believe it was “Jingoism,” that is to say the Beaconsfield policy, that gave the play its first interest, so far as England was concerned. When that random shot was fired by the Eastern question the difficulties melted away like snow. Bancroft got his brothers and the soldiers, Stephenson got his diplomatic tone, I got my Jingoism. Henry Beauclerc, the elder brother, was to be high up in diplomacy; Julian Beauclerc, the younger brother, was to be a soldier concerned in diplomacy, namely, a military *attaché* at a foreign court; and the despatch to be stolen by Zicka at the instigation of Baron

Stein was to be intimately connected with the defence of Constantinople, and so invaluable to illustrate the Eastern question; whilst the mysterious foreigner in love with Dora was of course turned into a Russian, Count Orloff. Eureka! we all cried. The thing was done before we arrived at Amiens for a *bouillon*.

On the disputed point of the ruin of Sardou's *Dora*, by the sudden thrusting in of "Jingoism," I am sorry to say I disagree entirely with Mr. Brander Matthews, in his book on French dramatists. He has written as follows: "Turned into English none too skilfully, and disfigured by the needless thrusting in of Jingoism, *Dora*, as *Diplomacy*, has been acted with popular applause throughout England and America." How the political character given to *Diplomacy* can be called "needless" I fail to see. An important despatch had to be stolen from an Englishman by a foreigner. The Englishman was to be a soldier con-

nected with diplomacy. Baron Stein and Zicka were unchangeable and unchanged. Why should it be needless to make the subject of the stolen despatch the "Defence of Constantinople," which was then the barrier between the Turk and the Russian? Well, at any rate, we proved that it was not "needless," because the Jingoism, *i.e.*, the Beaconsfield Eastern policy, was never held to be a detriment to the play. From that moment all worked smoothly. Our plan was cut-and-dried before we crossed the channel on our way home. All that had to be done was the writing of the play, which was finished in an incredibly small space of time. Bancroft used to hold up his hands in astonishment as the sheets of manuscript poured in upon him for his careful revision and judgment before they were sent on to the printer. As you all know, the names of Savile and Bolton Rowe were on the programmes, but I am sure Bancroft deserved to share fairly with us in any credit that fell to the adaptation of a very difficult work. He did not actually

write the dialogue, but his judgment and suggestions were invaluable. I have never met so careful, experienced, and diplomatic an editor of dramatic work as Mr. Bancroft, and *Diplomacy* is not my only experience of the value of his assistance, equally with that of his gifted wife, on any play submitted to them. It may be interesting to know that several names for the play were submitted. One of the most popular was *The Mouse Trap*. The names were shaken up in a hat, and Mrs. Bancroft drew *Diplomacy*. It was the title I had suggested.

Just now the tendency is the other way. Authors are inclined to ignore or pooh-pooh the theatrical manager who has taste, tact, and a very fair measure of literary judgment. They tell us with confidence that the manager is a cipher, and knows no more about the literary side of a play than the call-boy or the director of the orchestra. All I can say is that this is not my experience at all. I have worked

with Bancroft, I have worked with Horace Wigan, I have worked with Wilson Barrett, with Wyndham, with Hare, with Augustus Harris, with scores of other managers, and I can confidently assert that the author or adapter of the play or plays would have been at sea without them. Let us all give credit where credit is due. Surely Mr. Henry Arthur Jones would own that the suggestions and editorial sway of Wilson Barrett were invaluable in the *Silver King*; that even *Judah* wanted the blue pencil before it was finally polished for the stage. Is it on record—save, perhaps, in the case of Mr. Pinero—that any play, however clever, was produced on the stage exactly as it was written in the study? I don't believe it. There is nothing that a prolific and ready author hates so much as to be edited for the stage. I do at the time. It always seems that your best sentences and work go by the board. We who write a great deal invariably write too much in our plays. We all want editing and the blue pencil, particularly when we

are journalists. I dare say Mr. Sims does, and many others. I maintain that a good manager should be at the same time a good editor. There is not one of the managers I have mentioned—Bancroft, Hare, Wyndham, Wilson Barrett, and Augustus Harris—who would not have made good newspaper editors. I think Bancroft would make a model editor, for he has such consummate tact, great patience, vast knowledge of men and things. He is so thoroughly “a man of the world.” The best living editor of this our own day, under whom I have had the honour of serving for a considerable number of years, would equally have been a manager of men in any possible capacity. He has the art of directing and guiding. He would have made a good general or a good admiral; he was born to command and to lead. In his own department he knows exactly where to apply the “blue pencil,” and *he is always right*. He happens to be a newspaper proprietor and editor, but he would have ruled men and been cheer-

fully obeyed by them in any capacity. He makes work "a labour of love" to those who serve under him, for he blames kindly and praises ungrudgingly.

But Mr. Henry Arthur Jones seems to imply that because a manager has not always the gift of composition, that therefore he should stand aloof from the discussion of literature in plays. Never was there a greater or graver mistake. The best newspaper editors are not always writing leading articles; they are reading them, and, like clever doctors, putting their diagnosing fingers on the risky sentences. Two of the most celebrated editors that have passed away in our time were, surely, Mr. Delane, of the *Times*, and Mr. John Douglas Cook, of the old *Morning Chronicle* and the *Saturday Review*. I don't suppose they wrote a line in the newspapers they directed. Their art was direction. My own father, who served under Douglas Cook on both his newspapers, was an accurate scholar,

with a lively, independent spirit, and a very masterful mind. And yet he, with all his classical knowledge and his brilliant literary style, served without a murmur under Douglas Cook, who could not have written one of my father's *Chronicle* or *Saturday Review* articles to save his life. But Douglas Cook was a born editor, a man of observation, a man who knew men, and the world also. He knew how to pick out talent, and how to use the blue pencil. He would have directed a theatre as well as he edited a newspaper. The opera, the playhouse, or the newspaper would have flourished under the sway of this masterful and hard-headed man.

This is the stamp of man that we want at the head of dramatic enterprise where art is concerned. We want the virile, active man, not the dreamy theorist. We want a man to act, not to niggle and naggle. We want a born leader, not a half-and-half creature, pulled on one side

by personal vanity and on the other by a pretty woman. If a born leader is found among the ranks of the actors, by all means let him manage. We have many such even now—Irrving, Bancroft, Hare, Augustus Harris, &c., were all born to direct and lead men. But all we say is that, as a rule, the ideal manager may exist outside the actor's ranks as well as in them. There is room, and to spare, for many a Comyns Carr and an Augustin Daly.

We all of us read the other day the details of the will of an eccentric lady, who had left a certain sum of money in order to provide real eatables and drinkables for actors and actresses on the stage. Whether the report was true or not I cannot possibly say, but many of us who are constantly watching dramatic performances can, in a measure, sympathise with the excellent testatrix in her desire to render real and comforting that which is at present imaginative and dis-

appointing. I have always considered it the most difficult portion of an actor's art to avoid making the wryest of wry faces when he is swallowing Persian sherbet or seidlitz powders instead of Perrier Jouet of 1874, and cramming *plaisirs* into his mouth instead of pasties and pigeon-pies. How hard it must be to appear in an amiable and convivial mood, dressed up in silk coat and ruffles, when the rosy bowl of punch is filled with the nastiest and most revolting ingredients. How difficult to seem to be appeasing an insatiable appetite with paper sandwiches when probably the actor is not a bit hungry and the mere idea of food is distasteful to him. This art of "make-believe" may have come easily to Dick Swiveller's friend, the Marchioness, when she banqueted off orange-peel and water; but it must be assumed with an effort by the actor fresh from the luxurious fare of the Beefsteak Club or the Garrick. For instance, who can fail to pity Charles Surface and his guests when they are pretending to be in the most

rollicking spirits over punch and champagne, when probably they are imbibing doctor's stuff, ginger beer, or the smallest of small ale; and what is it, we all ask, that Mr. Beerbohm Tree, as the starved poet, Gringoire, swallows with such avidity at the command of Louis XI? What is the food provided for Mr. Henry Irving when he plays Jingle? and what are the contents of that mysterious pie that is placed before Triplet and his starving family?

At some theatres, no doubt, they do provide real food, much to the delight of hungry carpenters and supernumeraries. Years ago, when I was a frequent attendant at the Strand Theatre, one of the great features of a meal taken in an excellent farce, called *Short and Sweet*, was the fact that the management had provided a goodly sirloin of beef, on which Rogers and Clarke invariably made a hearty supper, as the farce happened to be played about 10.30, a very

convenient hour. And it is a matter of history that the pudding made by Mrs. Bancroft in the last act of *Ours*—a pudding, by the way, that was supposed to be cooked in a cloth, but was never tied up—was composed of excellent materials and became the perquisite of some favoured attendants, who for *their* supper enjoyed the “role-y-poley pudding” made in the Crimean hut by Miss Mary Netley.

At the same time this realism in stage food has its drawbacks. One of the most disastrous failures in the whole of my experience occurred mainly through the unwise liberality of an amateur management. Many years ago a very amiable and clever nobleman, whose passion was to write plays and to produce them, took the Globe Theatre, in order to produce a new play, called *Ecarté*.” The arrangements were to be very realistic and correct, for the Robertson revolution had established itself, and all the theatres were following suit as well as they were

able. Unfortunately, the author of *Ecarté*—a very clever and delightful fellow—had arranged that one of the scenes in the play should represent a modern picnic. Given a modern picnic, what more appropriate than that Messrs. Fortnum and Mason should provide a real hamper and an unlimited supply of first-class champagne. We in the stalls wondered if that stage picnic would ever come to an end. None of the artists were very perfect in their words, but they supplied ample dialogue, and much laughter, combined with chaff, as they sat on the ground and dived into pigeon-pies, carved up chickens, consumed ham and mayonnaise, and freely passed round the seductive bottle. When that stage picnic was over we all saw clearly the results of it. Most of the actors and actresses had imbibed too freely, and one actress in particular, who happened to be the manageress for the occasion, made a ridiculous exhibition of herself. Luckily the curtain came down soon after the fatal picnic, but when it rose again the fumes of the cham-

pagne had not subsided. All interest in the play had gone, and the audience, as they always do, began chaffing immoderately. The laughter did not cease when it was discovered that the heroine of the play was, as dear old Mrs. Brown used to say, "all mops and brooms." She appeared on the stage with dress disordered, and it was discovered that in the excitement of the moment she had only half changed her boots. She wore one green satin boot and one white satin shoe, which had a very comical effect; and when the laughter continued she came down to the footlights with a glassy eye and said, "What are you beastly fools laughing at? I sha'n't go on till you fellows stop laughing." This was the climax, and how the play ended without drawing down the curtain on the disgraceful scene I shall never cease to wonder. The play was produced on a Saturday night, and I remember I wrote an account of it, both for the *Observer* on Sunday and for the *Daily Telegraph* on Monday. This is the only instance on

record, in modern times, of a play being acted for one night only. *Ecarté* was withdrawn after that dreadful exhibition, and on the Monday, I think, Mr. Fairclough, an American tragedian, essayed the character of Hamlet. Comedy with real champagne had been too much for him.

Of course, I do not pretend on the present occasion to say all I could say about celebrated first nights. My friend, Mr. Sutherland Edwards, has written one book on the subject, but it might be followed up by many others. For instance, an evil destiny always seems to have attended the production of *Monte Cristo*. Years before I became a playgoer it was connected with an historical incident to which I think I have before alluded. The company of the Théâtre Historique, in Paris, came over to London to play the *Monte Cristo* of Dumas—I think at Drury Lane—but the protectionist party, who opposed all free trade, had got an insane

idea into their heads that French plays should never be allowed in London except at the St. James's Theatre. They were to be permitted there if the swells cared to see them, but nowhere else. When Rachel came over to play, had she appeared at Drury Lane or Covent Garden she would, in all probability, have been hooted from the stage. This is exactly what happened with poor *Monte Cristo*. The play was literally hissed off the stage, and this course was actually justified by great actors and literary men of eminence, who stoutly maintained that the French artist had no right to come over to England in order "to take the bread out of the mouth" of the poor English actor. The *Monte Cristo* riots were resumed, and it was not until the play was taken off to the St. James's Theatre that the French players were allowed to have a hearing. Strange to say, when *Monte Cristo* was again revived at the Adelphi in its English dress, in the days of Fechter and Benjamin Webster, another disastrous fate was in store for it. It was hours

too long, and after eleven the gallery and pit began "guying" the play, and echoing the remarks on the stage with interpolations of their own. The curtain did not fall until after midnight; and had not the play been a good one, and Fechter's acting admirable, it would never have survived the first dreadful shock.

But the longest play, and one of the most disastrous that occurs to my memory, was a drama by the Irish actor and author, Falconer, called *Oonagh*, which was produced at Her Majesty's Theatre. I commend this scene to the attention of the dramatists who are fond of writing fine speeches, and who disclaim any right of the manager to interfere with their beloved manuscript. No one was at hand with the blue pencil. Mr. Augustus Harris, or any practical man, might have made a very fine play out of *Oonagh*; but Mr. Falconer was one of those "actor-authors" who liked to hear themselves talk on the stage, and was equally grati-

fied when he heard his fellow-actors and actresses repeating his beloved "words." Oh for that blue pencil! What successes it might have made out of failures! It is bad enough when an actor-manager wants all the talk to himself, but when he allows all his characters to talk—and very little to the point—until nearly two o'clock in the morning, it is simply unendurable. There are various versions of the final termination of *Oonagh*, but I think mine is the correct one. All the public had left the theatre hours before, and were tucked up warm and comfortable in bed long before the curtain fell. Only the critics and a few of their friends remained faithful to their posts. On that memorable evening I can recall the faces of Palgrave Simpson, and Jack Clayton, and Herman Merivale, and I think Lewis Wingfield, and by my side may probably have been those eminently conscientious critics, Joe Knight, Charles Dunphie, and Henry Howe. The end came in this way. It was nearly two o'clock on Sunday morning, and they were still on the stage

talking, talking, talking. At last a malicious carpenter, who wanted to get home to bed, seized the occasion when the loquacious characters were, like the celebrated "Jolly butcher boys, all of a row." With the aid of another sleepy "pal," he pulled the stage carpet deliberately from under the feet of the actors on the stage, and down they came ignominiously on their backs. This was the only possible means of "arresting their conversation," and it was effectual. Another conspirator touched the prompter's bell, and before the talkative characters had time to scramble up and continue their talk, the curtain was rung down, and the dismal play was over. *Oonagh* was never finished. God be praised for it! I have told this story in my lecture, but not in such detail.

Rosalind! We were all talking of Rosalinds, after the brilliant performance of Miss Ada Rehan, who startled, surprised, and delighted us. "And

how many Rosalinds have you seen?" is the question very naturally put to me, as I talk with enthusiasm about the newest and best of the Rosalinds—a Rosalind with grace, a Rosalind who is a picture, a Rosalind of infinite distinction and of infinite humour, a Rosalind comely and stately, who can look a youth and need not cover up her shapely limbs with jack-boots or gaiters! Dear me, what a lovely Rosalind to please the eye and haunt the memory! What a delight it is to meet with a Rosalind who can really express the passion of love and its very ecstasy, who "loses her head" over the very delirium of loving, who rushes into the masquerade with the wild enthusiasm of a schoolgirl, whose meeting with Orlando on the top of all this excitement makes her quite hysterical with joy—a Rosalind who is a very woman and never an actress, a Rosalind who can change with the capriciousness of a woman, a "cheeky lad" at one minute, a woman the next, so overstrung with emotion that the tears course one another down her

cheeks as she embraces Celia with additional rapture because she does not know what to do to relieve herself of the overflow of excitement ! And this divine, this heavenly, Rosalind is the Rosalind that, in this dull, cynical, formal, matter-of-fact world they cold-shouldered as a Rosalind who is excessive and exaggerated, and too this, that, or the other. Don't you believe it, my dear friends. Miss Ada Rehan's Rosalind may be excessive, viewed by the light of Westbourne Grove young ladies. She would have been called to order if she played such pranks in the sylvan groves of Miss Pinkerton's academy. She might have been called "shocking" had she made an Orlando out of the butcher-boy or the doctor's assistant. But then Miss Ada Rehan's Rosalind happened to live in an ideal court, far removed from Brixton or Bedford Park. She wandered forth with faithful Celia and Touchstone to the Forest of Ardennes—not on a twopenny 'bus to Forest Hill. She was the creation of an imaginative poet, not of a nine-

teenth-century realist. Ada Rehan's Rosalind, indeed! Why, how on earth can any one of the ordinary world understand it? Why, look here! the morning after the performance my humble notice of the remarkable embodiment was printed side by side with a glowing account of the bangings and drummings and vile vulgarities of General Booth's Salvation Army at the Crystal Palace! In one column you could read of this "rorty revivalism"; in another of an imaginative creation! How could the age that believes in General Booth as a minister of salvation, and that applauds the hideous din and deplorable vulgarity of his followers, accept the new Rosalind as anything else but unintelligible? How can a Rosalind such as this live in the same hemisphere as a Salvation Army lass? The thing is impossible. The religious taste that can accept these screeching peacocks as evangelists will not live in the same street as the poetic taste that welcomes Miss Rehan as a beautiful recruit in the divine Shakesperian army!

But there, I did not sit down to tell you about Ada Rehan's Rosalind—though I would advise you to go and see it when opportunity offers, if you have any sense—I wanted to tell you about other Rosalinds. Well, I have seen Helen Faucit, and Mrs. Hermann Vezin, and Adelaide Neilson, and Mrs. Drake—a very clever sister of Mrs. Bancroft, one of the prettiest of Rosalinds—and Mrs. Scott Siddons, and Ada Cavendish, and Miss Marie Litton, and Mrs. Kendal, and Miss Wallis, and Mrs. Langtry, and I daresay scores more if I could only remember them. There was one Rosalind of all that I always wanted to see; but this Rosalind was bashful, and never appeared, much to my disappointment. Naturally I am not old enough ever to have seen the mighty Mrs. Jordan, or Mrs. Nisbett, with the incomparable laugh, of whom my old friend, Mrs. Keeley, speaks till the tears roll down her cheeks. No; I mean the Rosalind that I have never seen—no more has any one else—the Rosalind of Ellen Terry. Why on earth did this lovely actress never play Rosalind, I

wonder? I believe she would have beaten them all, with her grace, her beauty, her humour, and her picturesqueness! Oh! why did Ellen Terry the fair, Ellen Terry the marvellous, Ellen Terry the lily maid of Arcadie, never shoulder her staff and come through the forest trees in the character of Ganymede? The thing that I cannot quite understand is why America should want any more English Rosalinds when she has got such an incomparable one of her own, or why she should require English actors and actresses to speak blank verse to her when American artists are able to teach their English brothers and sisters the secret of elocution.

And yet I doubt not that when I meet my good friend Mr. William Winter—who knows all about the modern Rosalinds far better than I do, and who has written so much about the Rosalinds who lived before he was born that doubtless in ima-

gination he has seen them all and knows them all by heart—I shall be told that, much as he admires the Rosalind of Ada Rehan, he would still give the prize to Adelaide Neilson. I should not be very much surprised to hear that in this respect he was echoed by an equally learned critic, my old friend Joseph Knight. Well, to tell you the truth, I should reverse the order, for I am perfectly convinced that Ada Rehan is the best Rosalind I have ever seen. I would not suppress one shade of the restlessness that belongs to the new Rosalind; but I would, perhaps, diminish just one note of the “squeak” when the frightened Rosalind tries to cover up her accusing legs. This is the only modern moment in the play. It is only here that the mind goes back to *Nancy and Co.*, and that the fun is not Rosalind’s, but farcical comedy adapted from the German or French.

I suppose the most surprising instance of intrepid energy and determined self-

education for the stage was the case of Adelaide Neilson, who with comparatively little training, but with the aid of remarkable personal beauty, became the first actress of her time. I remember well being asked by Philip Lee, an old Rugbeian, whom I had met at Brasenose College, Oxford, where he was a famous member of the celebrated Phoenix Club, to go and see a remarkable actress who was to make her *début* as Juliet at the Royalty Theatre, in Dean Street, Soho. She was said to be a girl wonderfully lovely, and with surprising talent—at least, so said “honest Jack Ryder,” who was an excellent instructor, and noted as the “Juliet maker” of his time. Who shall say how many Juliets he turned out? It cannot be denied that Adelaide Neilson was the best. Many stories were circulated then and since concerning the origin of Neilson with which we need not concern ourselves. If she was of humble origin, so much the more credit to her for bravely battling to the front and conquering the past. The public are not con-

cerned with the origin of actresses. Adelaide Neilson unquestionably had Spanish blood in her veins, but she was the most remarkable—well, I will say one of the most remarkable, for I know another—instances of a woman who suddenly took to the stage and educated herself, not only for her profession, but to enable her to hold her own in conversation with the most highly educated and learned men. She became an admirable elocutionist; she conquered the provincial blurr in her accent; she taught herself French, and was able in a few years to speak the language fluently, and she knew a little Greek and Latin as well. The success of Adelaide Neilson was immediate. The beauty and talent combined were irresistible. The Royalty success confirmed a previous semi-private one at Miss Thorne's theatre at Margate, and when she went to the Princess's to play in the *Huguenot Captain* she became the talk of the town. But America did almost more for Neilson's fame than England. There she made her fortune; she came to Europe to spend it.

There never was a [more charitable or unselfish woman in the theatrical profession than Adelaide Neilson. Her good works done in secret were worthy of a Nell Gwynne. She was the most generous, good-natured, and loyal of women, and I never heard her say one unkind or uncharitable word of a human being. Such a quality as spite or envy did not exist in her nature. She had a good word for everybody, even for her rivals in art. Of how few can this be said, even by those who ostentatiously mount the platform of the Pharisees, "make broad their phylacteries," and say *ore rotundo*, "Thank God I am not as other women are!" The kindly heart and generous nature of Adelaide Neilson will never be allowed to die, for when she passed away so suddenly in Paris, in the height of her beauty and her fame, her true-hearted friend and faithful trustee, Admiral Carr Glynn, invested a portion of her property in a fund, out of which the trustees have been able to soften many a sick bed and to dry many a widow's tears. I happen to be a little

behind the scenes in this matter, and you would not believe the blessings that are poured on Adelaide Neilson's memory when we are able to do for her just what she would have done had she been alive—open the purse and give a mite, not with ostentation, but in secrecy, not with blowing of trumpets, but with a "God bless you!" and a silent pressure of the hand. As one of my fellow trustees wrote to me the other day, when I put a sad case before him: "The Neilson Fund is indeed a blessing!"

When I told the story of Tom Robertson's version of the "Wreck of the 'Birkenhead,'" dramatised at the Holborn Theatre under the name, *For Love*, I suddenly was inundated with correspondence and comments. As it is a matter of history, some of the information derived from the letters is well worth preserving.

An old soldier wrote to me:—"With reference to your remarks last week on the subject of the 'Wreck of the *Birkenhead*' and an alleged sole survivor in Captain Ralph Bond Shelton, I may point out that upwards of one hundred persons were saved from the wreck, and that of the officers rescued there still survive two, in Lieut.-Colonel John Francis Giradot, of Manor House, Barrow-on-Trent, late of the 43rd Light Infantry and Notts Militia, and Captain Ralph Shelton Bond—whose correct name is as stated, and not as given last week [The officer in question has since, I understand, assumed the name of Shelton in addition to that of Bond]—late of the 12th Lancers. The *Birkenhead*, a splendid steamer of her kind, and borne in the 'Navy List' as a transport, carried reinforcements for troops at the Cape, comprising drafts of the 12th Lancers, 2nd Queen's, 6th Royals, 12th Regiment, 43rd Light Infantry, 60th Rifles, 73rd Regiment, 74th and 91st Highlanders, and was on her way from Simon's Bay

to Cape Town, when, on the night of February 26, 1852, she struck on a rock about two and a half miles off Point Danger, and in less than twenty-five minutes filled and went down. The senior officer of the troops, Major Alexander Seton, of the 74th, was drowned in the wreck, and the honour of commanding the troops who on that awful occasion exhibited such true heroism belonged to Captain Edward W. C. Wright, of the 91st Highlanders. When full details of the wreck of the transport reached England it was clearly ascertained that Captain Wright had directly inspired his men by setting a very noble example, and in recognition of his services he received promotion to major and a Distinguished Service reward. He became subsequently known as the 'hero of the *Birkenhead*,' gained a lieut.-colonelcy in the Caffir war, and died twenty years ago a colonel and C.B., Deputy Inspector of the Reserve Forces, and a man honoured throughout the British army. Colonel Girardot, at that

time a young lieutenant in the 43rd, and Captain Bond, who was a cornet in the 12th Lancers, were saved, the former on a raft, and the latter by swimming with one of Mackintosh's life-preservers on. Both subsequently served through the Kaffir war, and, as stated, still survive, although long since retired from the service—Captain Bond as far back as 1856. The captain of the *Birkenhead*, Robert Salmond, a master in the navy, lost his life in the wreck, the only ship's officers saved being the assistant surgeon, William Culhane, two engineers, two clerks, and the master's assistant, R. B. Richards, who is stated to have behaved admirably. All are, I believe, long since dead. The story of the wreck was furnished by Captain Wright, in a report to the commandant of Cape Town, and was in due course sent in to the Admiralty and made public. It is a very clear and soldierlike narrative, and gives every credit for the order and regularity which prevailed on board from the time the ship struck until she eventually dis-

appeared, far exceeding, so states Captain Wright, anything that he thought could be effected by the best discipline, and the more to be wondered at seeing that most of the soldiers had been but a short time in the service, and were, in fact, fresh from the recruiting depôts. The loss amounted to 9 officers and 349 men, besides those of the crew, the total number embarked being 15 officers and 476 men (one officer and eighteen men were disembarked in Simon's Bay). I may add that the men on board had been ordered by the master of the *Birkenhead* to jump overboard, and were restrained by Captain Wright from an act which he saw must inevitably have been the means of swamping the boat in which the women and children had been rescued. Captain Wright was nobly backed up by Lieutenant Giradot, of the 43rd, in his successful efforts to keep the troops in hand, and we can only express our wonder that the latter has never received any official recognition of his heroism. The

name of John Francis Giradot should be honoured for all time, in company with that of Captain Edward Wright."

Another correspondent wrote :—" You have once again revived the dramatic story of the wreck of the *Birkenhead* ; but while that fatal February morning in 1852, when the unfortunate troopship struck on a rock off the Cape, and within twenty minutes broke up and foundered, will ever be remembered for the heroic courage and discipline displayed by all concerned, it is to be feared that the dramatic incident that has so often been related of the troops being paraded, and, after firing a salute, sinking shoulder to shoulder, owes its existence to the fertile imagination of some sensational tale-teller. Nothing certainly can have exceeded the discipline on the ill-fated vessel, when it is remembered that out of the 630 souls and more on board, of whom only 180 escaped, not one single woman or child perished. Captain

Wright (of the 91st Highlanders), one of the survivors, speaking in his official report in the highest terms of the order which prevailed on board from the moment the vessel struck till barely twenty minutes later she parted, compliments the troops—young men only recently joined—on the discipline, obedience, and absence of any rush for the boats; but he says nothing of the parade and the final salute. It is worthy of note that in the other contemporary reports furnished by several other survivors—among them Cornet Bond, now Captain Shelton Bond—and to be found in the *Times* of April 6, 7, 8 and 9, 1852, not a single word of the romantic story of the parade appears; while details are not wanting of the horrors of the position in the morning twilight, the sharks greedily snapping up the half-naked wretches suddenly thrown into the water, together with the exposure for hours of many of the sufferers clinging to the rigging of the submerged vessel.”

It would be curious to discover the genesis of the legend of the paraded soldiers on board the sinking *Birkenhead*. I may frankly confess that some little research among the authorities on the question has not revealed even a hint which might have suggested its incubation. Like the wonderful story of the pipes being heard at the relief of Lucknow so many hours before Sir Colin Campbell actually appeared, and like the story of the Duke of Wellington's "Up, Guards, and at 'em!" we are afraid the *Birkenhead* parade must be described as a clever exercise of imagination. None the less, while the English language lasts, we may feel sure that the memory will never die of the gallant soldiers who, with such genuine British bravery, helped on that memorable occasion to save the lives of others at the sacrifice of their own safety.

In this connection, perhaps, it may not be out of place to quote three stanzas

from the poem composed on the event by the late Sir Francis Hastings Doyle, and communicated by a correspondent :—

“There rose no murmur from the ranks, no thought
By shameful strength unhonoured life to seek—
Our post to quit : we were not trained or taught
To trample down the weak.

“So we made women with their children go.
The oars ply back again and yet again,
Whilst inch by inch the drowning ship sank low,
Still under stedfast men.

“What followed why recall ? The brave who died—
Died without flinching in the bloody surf ;
They sleep as well beneath that purple tide
As others under turf.”

All who take a sincere interest in the drama must have observed, with something like alarm, a tendency in recent years to make the stage a pulpit and a platform, instead of a place of legitimate and general amusement. It is assumed, on very insufficient evidence, that literature is divorced from the drama. This is

the common cant of the superior young person. It is argued that the Philistines hold possession of the stalls. The superfine young gentlemen of to-day try to din into our ears that our dramatic system is all wrong, that conventionality is throttling the poor old drama, that all our plays are constructed and arranged on a false system, and that the day of a dramatic revolution is at hand. We are told that the people who go to the play don't want to be amused or interested—they want to be instructed. In the future they are not to be stimulated, but talked at. The theatre is not to be a reaction and a relief from the worries of the day, but an aggravation of its argumentative horrors. Unquestionably the experiment announced by Mr. Beerbohm Tree of a series of "Unpopular Mondays" at the Haymarket delighted the active, earnest, and energetic revolutionists. Here was a chance of seeing all the plays that had been buried for years at the dictation of the vain and muddle-headed managers of

the old school. The light would dawn at last; the new era would begin.

With characteristic energy and independence, the Haymarket manager started the series with a play that was supposed to be the *bête noire* of managers. At last *Beau Austin*, by Robert Louis Stevenson and W. E. Henley, was to smell the foot-lights. It had been offered to many managers, including Mr. Henry Irving, and apparently rejected by all. Doubtless they all admired its literature, but doubted its staying powers. Among the enthusiastic admirers of *Beau Austin* were Mr. George Moore and Mr. William Archer. On them had been conferred the privilege of reading this masterpiece. Mr. George Moore rushed into print, and asked, with tears in his voice, when *Beau Austin* was to be produced; Mr. William Archer, loyal and true to the editor of the *Scots Observer*—no longer a warm admirer of Henry Irving, but now of opinion that no one but a

born idiot could praise *Ravenswood* at the Lyceum—read *Beau Austin*, delighted in it, and very generously, according to his own showing, tried to get it acted. He had a strong opinion, and in that opinion he was sincere.

But I question if many playgoers who saw *Beau Austin* on the occasion of its first production could have conceived it possible that a critic and authority, usually so temperate, so judicial, and so unemotional, could have been led away—obviously with sincerity—to place *Beau Austin* on such a pinnacle of fame. Mr. Archer very candidly tells us that he was prejudiced in favour of *Beau Austin*. He admits having read the play cursorily five years ago, and it is obvious that the perusal of the play must have created a stronger impression than he imagined, for he seemed in the case of *Beau Austin* to be sounding the war-whoop, and to be raising the cry of Stevenson and Henley

to the rescue, as recently he raised the cry of Ibsen to the front.

Did anyone ever hear such praise as this from William Archer:—

“I was prepared for, I had braced myself up to accept, the said starting point, while, on the other hand, the classic simplicity and symmetry of the action, the poignancy of the emotional process, the incomparable grace and subtlety of the style, all came upon me with the vividness of new sensations. Believe me or not, as you please, the play gripped me so that I felt the entr’actes a positive nuisance. They invited me to exchange greetings with an old friend returned only a few hours before from three years’ voyaging east of the sun and west of the moon. But I would much rather have remained in my seat and kept the illusion unbroken; not that I loved — less, but that I loved *Beau Austin* more.”

Or again—

“What a keen and unaccustomed joy it was to hear such finely chased prose spoken on the English stage. I should not be surprised if this scene were to make *Beau Austin* a stage classic. No actor or actress of any literary intelligence but will long for an opportunity to give his or her reading of this noble passage.”

Or again—

“I shall always reckon that Monday evening among the most remarkable of my theatrical experiences.”

Or again—

“It was a play of incontestable literary interest *by two of the finest craftsmen of our time, both in prose and verse.*”

Or again—

“A better made play (in the best sense of the phrase) it would be difficult to cite.”

And finally—

“In short, Mr. Tree could not have launched his new enterprise more judiciously. People who care only for the violent delights of melodrama will probably condemn *Beau Austin*, as they would *Le Chandelier*, or *On ne Badine pas avec l'Amour*. Those, on the other hand, who are athirst for more delicate and complex sensations than the English stage is wont to afford will make a point of waiting on the *Beau* at their earliest opportunity. And they are to be numbered, I believe by thousands.”

Whew! whew! Mr. Archer, you positively take my breath away. I don't quite know whether I am on my head or my heels. Why they used to accuse me

of gush, as they politely called it, and exaggeration, but you have fairly beaten me at my own game of lawful enthusiasm, without which the stage and players must die. What do you say? Robert Louis Stevenson and W. E. Henley are two of the finest craftsmen in their line in prose and verse? The author of the prologue to *Beau Austin*, with its unscannable lines, the finest craftsman in verse! Which of the two is it, Mr. Archer, I beg you to tell me, who reminds you of Alfred de Musset? What is the passage in the new play that can hold a candle to *Le Chandelier* or *On ne Badine pas*. A stage classic is to be the future triumph for *Beau Austin*, is it? A better made play it would be difficult to cite! ye Gods! and Mr. William Archer has read nearly every play ever written since the days of Shakespeare and long before he was born. In all the range of Mr. Archer's wide experience, he cannot quote a better made play than *Beau Austin*. Well, I have heard of the clannishness of Scotsmen, but this beats cock-fighting.

But why not, dear friend Archer, with all your love of literature and the modern Athens, why not praise this unexampled masterpiece without "contemning" the "violent delights of melodrama?" Why imagine, as the superfine school continually does, that melodrama is the only fare that the British public loves; nay, the only fare that is placed upon the dramatic dinner-table? Only the other day, dear Mr. Archer, you praised Mr. Carton's *Sunlight and Shadow*, and I do not think you would endorse the opinion of one of your friends who called it "sentimental cat lap." I don't think you wholly objected to the *Middleman* or *Judah*, or *The Profligate*, and you and I don't think that one of these plays could be classed among the "violent delights of melodrama." There are no violent melodramatic delights in *A Pair of Spectacles*, a charmingly written play that has drawn crowded houses to the Garrick. Is it just to assume that the whole playgoing world is to be branded with Philistinism because it cannot accept *Beau Austin* as a stage

classic, or will not compare its authors with Alfred de Musset? Is it honest, is it straightforward, to imply, as the super-fine and superior person does constantly imply, that hundreds of excellent dramatists, who have worked successfully for the stage since the Robertson revival, are necessarily devoid of literary taste and faculty because they have not written books or poems?

Luckily, Mr. Archer, you have given me one loop-hole for escape. Although you indirectly institute a comparison between *Beau Austin* and the masterpieces of Alfred de Musset; although you think it will become a stage classic; although you cannot, with all your learning, quote a better made play, not even among the store of your beloved Ibsen; although you think the author of *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* and the editor of the *Scots Observer* two of the finest craftsmen of our time in prose and verse, still you candidly own, by a side wind, that "the play

has its faults of construction, of development, perhaps even of style," which is a pretty strong reservation for a masterpiece and a future stage classic.

I am sometimes told, Mr. Archer, that you and I are exact opposites ; that I am impressionable, whilst you are reserved ; that I am the advocate, whereas you are the judge. It is quite true that I had not the advantage of reading the play beforehand—a privilege reserved for yourself, Mr. George Moore, and a few others—I did not take my seat with my brain charged with the wit and humour and epigram of the "two finest craftsmen of our time." I had to pick up the literary excellence of the play—as the general public was compelled to do—through the glasses of the spectators, and as you well know, actors and actresses are not always very distinct or perfect on a first night. But I tell you candidly, I thought that the whole of the opening dialogue at the tea-table, admirable as it may be

in literature, was far too protracted and prosy for the stage. It worried me, whilst it evidently stimulated and exhilarated you. I was not stimulated or exhilarated. I was depressed, and so were dozens—and they were not fools—who sat around me. Now, of course, though Sheridan cannot be mentioned in the same breath as the author of *Beau Austin*, still he was a literary man as well as a dramatist. He never bored his audiences. His dialogue sparkles in our ears to-day, although we know it all by heart. You cannot cite a better made play than *Beau Austin*? Well, everyone to his tastes. I can cite a far better made play—one out of ten thousand better made plays. I shall be content with the *School for Scandal*, until I find a better modern play.

How strange it is that our opinions should be so diametrically opposed on a mere technical matter alone. I wonder if “wine tasters” differ so absolutely as we

do. Fancy, if I cracked up a bottle of fine claret as '74 port, and you judged old champagne as Madeira. They would call one or other of us an ignoramus, would they not? When I remember that never-ending dialogue at the starting of the play, which told me nothing that I wanted to know; when I recall Dorothy's spontaneous confession and her lover's reception of it; when I ponder over the main motive which you yourself condemn; when I picture to myself the soiling of Dorothy, the sudden conversion of the Beau, and the triviality of the last scene with the dumb Duke, I honestly should not be far wrong if I called *Beau Austin* a very badly made play as plays go. I think I am pretty quick and alert to sympathetic and human interest, but I seldom remember to have been interested less over what you call an ambitious work that has a decidedly literary flavour in it. Now, was it possible to have collected, in all London, a more sympathetic and intelligent audience, but do you honestly think,

dear Mr. Archer, that one-third of these would have cared to sit the play out again. I very much doubt it myself.

I turn from the earnest enthusiasm of Mr. William Archer, and find in another inspired organ an anonymous article that goes even further still in its desire to induce the public to patronise bad plays. The writer says:—

“*Beau Austin*, whether it is interesting or dull, whether it is well-written or ill-written, whether it draws or loses money, is, thank Heaven, a play *which two men have tried to write well*. I don't care if it is only a series of scenes, a sequence of un consequential incidents, disconnected and crude judged as a dramatic work. To my mind there is a freshness and originality in every line that is spoken which is invigorating, and reminds one of coming out of the mental fog of melodrama into the breezy heights of literature. *Beau Austin* is a play to read : a play to be read over and over again.”

There they are at it again! The mental fog of melodrama. The Beau Austinites will not believe that comedy is ever played in England. They will not recognise the fact that a dramatist lives who

has been educated beyond the School-board standard. They forget that even Mr. Tree, the apostle of the new superfine religion, the rock to which the young superior person clings, does not disdain melodrama, and has actually desecrated the sacred stage of the Haymarket with *Called Back*, and, having coquetted with *Beau Austin*, does not disdain the commercial aspect of affairs. But the recommendation that we should all go and admire *Beau Austin* because two men have *tried to write well* is too delicious for words. A burden is taken off my own soul, and I feel as if someone had given me absolution for my sins—it must have been *The Village Priest*, Mr. Beerbohm Tree—for I know that most of the plays that I myself tried to write well turned out the most disastrous failures. Oh! how often have I tried to write well for the stage, and how I have been laughed at for my pains. They told me that my plays might be all very well to read, but they bored everyone to listen to them. I did not think my critics were right at the time, but I

honestly do so now. So I took a mighty resolve, and left off writing for the stage altogether. I found out it was not my trade. I had qualified myself as a critic by being a failure in art, so I stuck to the old calling.

There is a natural tendency to think that a popular writer in other departments of literature *must* succeed as a dramatist. But it is not so. Browning and Tennyson, amongst poets, have failed as dramatists. It does not follow that Swinburne, who can write dramatic poems, would write a stage play. Thackeray and Dickens were dramatic enough, but they were not dramatists. Mr. Walter Besant sticks to his novels, and does extremely well. It is almost impossible for the most brilliant writer to write well for the stage who does not understand the stage. Why, then, should it be considered impossible for Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson or Mr. W. E. Henley to fail at the outset as drama-

tists because they are said to be "two of the finest craftsmen of our time in prose and verse." I don't say that in time they will not write a very admirable play, but I don't think that time has come yet. They do not as yet understand the stage. They have not studied audiences. They are new to the dramatic business. They are clever amateurs in the theatre, though they are both brilliant enough in the study.

But the pitiful thing about these purely critical discussions is that they cannot apparently be carried on in these modern days without imputing motives, and indulging in petty personalities, utterly unworthy of men of manners and distinction. I have little doubt that the authors of *Bedu Austin*, and their friends, have criticised scores of books and plays also, and I am certain that they did so in perfect good faith. It is part of the trade to which they belong to review or criticise books. But had they signed their names

to their, doubtless, honest criticisms, they would have been very much astonished if they had been told that they were tavern loafers, or venal disorderly men. The authors of *Beau Austin*, and their very injudicious friends, know perfectly well that in the case of *Beau Austin* criticism was courted. We were asked to come. Our opinion was sought. We were not invited to the playhouse on any conditions. We were not asked to take a brief for or against *Beau Austin*. Some liked the play, some disliked it. It was purely a matter of opinion. Why, then, all this unseemly pother? Why this most silly renewal of the "chicken and champagne" nonsense? Why all this vulgarity about the "kerb-stone of Fleet Street," and dictating criticisms at theatrical bars, and all the feminine nonsense of which the authors of *Beau Austin* must be heartily ashamed, although they are only indirectly responsible for the want of taste of their injudicious friends? If some of these intemperate gentlemen knew as much about the disagreeable and distasteful

duty known as dramatic criticism as I do, they would be in no such hurry to judge it a bed of roses, or to envy us the posts we occupy. Some day I hope to tell my story of the life of a dramatic critic, and then I shall be able to turn the tables in grim earnest. Then I shall have to tell the tale of toil unrewarded, of duty unrecognised, of time wasted, and motives ungenerously misrepresented in the cause of an art still dear to me, in spite of the vexation it has caused. Instead of drinking champagne and eating chicken at the expense of actors, I have been striving to advance their interests, and to advertise their aims ; instead of tea-drinking with fair actresses, I have had to devote unrewarded time to the unending recital of their woes ; instead of doing harm to authors I have undertaken, in addition to my own labours, the ungrateful task of reading, and studying, and advising on their often immature plays. But the time for telling my story has not yet come. I can afford to wait, and smile at the impotence of prejudiced opposition a little

longer. Meanwhile, after being before the public for thirty years, I can afford to laugh at these periodical epidemics, and to console myself with the reflection that at least I have tried "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call me."

THE END.

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